

‘FORSE IN PARNASO ESTO LOCO SOGNARO’.  
PARNASSIAN IMAGERY AND DANTE’S EARTHLY PARADISE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates Dante’s reworking of classical myths and tropes connected to Parnassus in the *Commedia*. References to Parnassian imagery, seemingly scattered throughout the poem, have been studied by Dante’s scholars only on a case-by-case basis and in the context of single cantos. However, these references are not isolated and independent from one another and I propose to look at them as part of a carefully planned metaphorical system.

Through an in-depth analysis of the text of the *Commedia* and an investigation on classical and medieval sources, this research examines how Dante reshapes the classical idea of Parnassus and adapts it to his needs. My intent is to show how Parnassian imagery fosters some fundamental reflections on the power, the limits, and the purpose of poetry.

Following an Introduction that describes the aims, scope, and method of the dissertation, Chapter 1 analyses the occurrence of Parnassian images in *Purgatorio* XXII and pinpoints the main lines of reflections conveyed by the presence of Parnassus in the poem. Chapter 2 and 3 focus on the cantos of the Earthly Paradise (which contain the majority of Parnassian allusions in the *Commedia*) and investigate Dante’s reuse of Parnassian myths and tropes at the end of *Purgatorio*, proposing a series of parallels between Parnassian and Edenic landscapes. Chapter 4 revolves around the last reference to Parnassus in *Paradiso* I and reflects on the interaction between classical and Christian poetry at the beginning of the third cantica. Finally, the conclusion summarises the most significant findings of the dissertation and suggests future related lines of research.

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The text of the *Commedia* is cited from Dante Alighieri, *La 'Commedia' secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1966-67, repr. Florence: Le Lettere, 1994), unless otherwise stated.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of *Paradiso* I, Dante opens the third cantica of the *Commedia* with a long invocation to Apollo, asking the Delphic god to grant him the poetic inspiration that is necessary to face the artistic and intellectual challenges of his ‘ultimo lavoro’.<sup>1</sup> Here, in a very debated tercet, Dante claims that he needs both the peaks of Parnassus in order to complete his poem:

Infino a qui l'un giogo di Parnaso  
assai mi fu; ma or con amendue  
m'è uopo intrar ne l'aringo rimaso. (*Paradiso* I, 16-18)

Following an ancient literary tradition, Dante establishes a connection between his ‘sacrato poema’ and the mountain that classical authors identified as the place sacred to poetry, Parnassus.

The scholarly discussion about the opening invocation of *Paradiso* is rich and multi-faceted, from a philological, allegorical and metapoetic point of view. Dante’s prayer to Apollo has been analysed in the context of *Paradiso* I, as a gateway to the third cantica, and in comparison with the other invocations of the poem.<sup>2</sup> Many studies have investigated the presence of classical (and especially Ovidian) intertextuality in this passage, and have reflected on how these images interact

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<sup>1</sup> *Paradiso* I, 13-36.

<sup>2</sup>For some *lecturae* of *Paradiso* I which also include a reading of this invocation, see Giorgio Petrocchi, ‘Il canto I del *Paradiso*’, in *Filologia e critica dantesca. Studi offerti ad Aldo Vallone* (Florence: Olschki, 1989), pp. 237-50; Selene Sarteschi, ‘Canto I’, in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone, 3 vols (Florence: Cesati, 2000-2002), II. *Paradiso* (2002), 13-34; Robert Hollander, ‘Il prologo alla terza cantica – *Paradiso* I-II’, in *Esperimenti danteschi. Paradiso 2010*, ed. by Tommaso Montorfano (Genoa-Milan: Marietti, 2010), pp. 3-25; Marco Ariani, ‘Canto I. *Alienatus animus in corpore*: deificazione e ascesa alle sfere celesti’, in *Lectura Dantis Romana. Cento canti per cento anni*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi, 3 vols (Rome: Salerno, 2013-2015), III.I *Paradiso. Canti I-XVII* (2015), 27-60. For an analysis of this passage as part of the system of invocations in the poem, see Robert Hollander, ‘Dante’s Nine Invocations Revisited’, *L’Alighieri, Rassegna Dantesca*, 54 (2013), 5-32; Giuseppe Ledda, “‘Dire grandissime cose’: protasi, invocazioni, indicibilità”, in Giuseppe Ledda, *La guerra della lingua. Ineffabilità, retorica e narrativa nella ‘Commedia’ di Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2002), pp. 13-55; Giuseppe Ledda, ‘Invocazioni e preghiere per la poesia nel *Paradiso*’, in *Pregghiera e liturgia nella ‘Commedia’. Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi di Ravenna, 12 novembre 2011*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Centro Dantesco dei Frati Minori Conventuali, 2013), pp. 125-154.

with the Christian lexicon and biblical references.<sup>3</sup> Minor efforts, however, have been made to understand the full implications of the allusion to Parnassus at this point of the *Commedia* and to understand what it means for Dante to cast his entire poem as written under the influence of the classical mountain of poetry.

Speaking in purely geographical terms, Parnassus is a mountain massif with many peaks located in central Greece, in the region that used to be called Phocis. The remarkable height of this mountain and its proximity to other holy sites, such as the city of Delphi with Apollo's sanctuary and its oracle, are probably the reasons why Parnassus soon became a sacred place in the ancient imagination. The mountain had been connected with the cult of Apollo and Bacchus since ancient times, and we can find traces of this relationship in Greek tragedies from the fifth century BC.<sup>4</sup> In the first century AD, Lucan still describes Parnassus as 'mons Phoebus Bromioque sacer' and the idea of these two gods living on the top of the mountain remained alive in the late-antique and medieval imagination as well.<sup>5</sup> However, partially because of the proximity between Parnassus and

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<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of Dante's re-use of Ovidian myths in this passage, with an eye on the relationship between Ovidian intertextuality and biblical references, see, among others, Peter S. Hawkins, 'Transfiguring the Text: Ovid, Scripture and the Dynamics of Allusion', *Stanford Italian review*, 5, 2, (1985), 115-119 (repr. in Peter S. Hawkins, *Dante's Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 180-93); Kevin Brownlee, 'Pauline Vision and Ovidian Speech in *Paradiso* I', in *The Poetry of Allusion. Virgil and Ovid in Dante's 'Commedia'*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 202-213; Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 193-98; Jessica Levenstein, 'The re-formation of Marsyas in *Paradiso* I', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini and Harry Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 408-421; Giuseppe Ledda, 'Modelli biblici nella *Commedia*: Dante e San Paolo', in *La Bibbia di Dante. Esperienza mistica, profezia e teologia biblica in Dante. Atti del Convegno internazionale di Studi di Ravenna, 7 novembre 2009*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Centro Dantesco dei Frati Minori Conventuali, 2011), pp. 179-216.

<sup>4</sup> On the image of Parnassus in ancient culture and later centuries, see Klaus Freitag, 'Parnassus', in *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopedia of the Ancient World*, ed. by Hubert Cancik and Helmut Schneider (*Antiquity*) and Manfred Landfester (*Classical Tradition*), English ed. by Christine F. Salazar (*Antiquity*) and Francis G. Gentry (*Classical Antiquity*), 22 vols (Brill: Leiden-Boston, 2002-2011), *Antiquity*, x (2007), 542-43; Elisabeth Schröter, 'Parnassus' in *Brill's New Pauly, Classical Tradition*, IV (2009), 302-13.

<sup>5</sup> Lucan, *Pharsalia* V, 73. For the origins of the cult of Apollo and Bacchus on Mount Parnassus, see Jeremy McInerney, 'Parnassus, Delphi and the Thyiades', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 38 (1997), 263-83. For the idea of Parnassus as inhabited by Bacchus and Apollo in late-antique and medieval imagery, see also Violetta De Angelis, "'...e l'ultimo Lucano'", in *Dante e la 'bella scola' della poesia. Autorità e sfida poetica*, ed. by Amilcare A. Iannucci (Ravenna: Longo, 1993) pp. 145-206 (now in Violetta De Angelis, *Scritti di filologia medievale e umanistica*, ed. by Filippo Bognini and Maria Patrizia Bologna (Naples: D'Auria, 2011), pp. 95-150). More bibliography on this specific matter will be provided in Chapter 4.

Delphi, the role of Apollo became more prominent with time, especially from the Augustan age onwards, and many of the myths associated with Parnassus revolve around the figure of the Delphic god.<sup>6</sup>

As regards descriptive elements, Latin sources depict Parnassus as extremely high and twin peaked. Ovid, for example, pictures Parnassus as a mountain which touches the stars with its two crests ('mons ibi verticibus petit arduus astra duobus'),<sup>7</sup> while Lucan describes the mount as reaching the sky with 'gemino colle'.<sup>8</sup> One of the main myths associated with Parnassus recalls how Deucalion and Pyrrha found shelter on the mountain during a deluge that flooded the entire world because the highest peak of Parnassus remained the only piece of land emerging from the water.<sup>9</sup> Parnassus was also depicted as steep and barely accessible to men. Both Virgil and Lucan, for example, use the adjective *desertus* to describe the mountain, which requires extraordinary effort to climb.<sup>10</sup>

From a symbolic point of view, Parnassus was connected with the idea of poetic creativity and inspiration. As Elisabeth Schröter points out in the entry on Parnassus contained in *Brill's New Pauly*, this association is 'the result of a long process in the history of ideas' but appears well established in classical antiquity.<sup>11</sup> Latin *auctores* used to mention Parnassus as the place where the gods of poetry reside or as a synonym for poetry itself. When Virgil, in the middle of the third book of the *Georgics*, claims the dignity of his subject matter and states his devotion to poetry, he depicts himself as driven to Mount Parnassus by a love that cannot be controlled, a love that 'raptat' him, that drags him violently to the mountain of poetry:

Sed me Parnasi deserta per ardua dulcis  
raptat amor; iuvat ire iugis, qua nulla priorum

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the myth of Apollo and Daphne, recalled by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* I, 452-567 and re-used by Dante in the invocation of *Paradiso* I, begins on Mount Parnassus and we find a close connection between the mountain and the laurel in several Latin texts. See, for example, Virgil, *Georgics* II, 18, Propertius, *Elegies* III, 13, 54 and Plinius, *Natural History* XV, 134. For an overview of the figure of Apollo in ancient times, see Anne Ley, 'Apollo', in *Brill's New Pauly. Antiquity*, I (2002), 850-57. More information about this complex cult and its medieval reception will be provided in Chapter 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 316.

<sup>8</sup> Lucan, *Pharsalia* V, 72. On the two peaks of Parnassus, see also *Thebaid* I, 628 and V, 532.

<sup>9</sup> See Virgil, *Georgics* I, 60-63; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 240-415; *Fasti* IV, 791-94.

<sup>10</sup> See Virgil, *Georgics* III, 291-93 and Lucan, *Pharsalia* III, 173.

<sup>11</sup> Schröter, 'Parnassus', col. 302.

Castaliam molli devertitur orbita clivo.

Nunc, veneranda Pales, magno nunc ore sonandum. (*Georgics* III, 291-94)

Similarly, when Persius wants to define the comic style of his *Satirae*, distancing himself from a higher kind of poetry, he claims that he did not sleep on Mount Parnassus or drink from its waters, which were metaphorically associated with poetic inspiration: 'Nec fonte labra prolui caballino / nec in bicipiti somniasse Parnaso / memini'.<sup>12</sup> The relation between Parnassus and poetry became a *topos* in classical literature. For this reason, Parnassus presents some connections with the cult of the Muses as well, goddesses of the arts who traditionally resided on a different mountain in Boeotia (Helicon) but were often depicted together with Apollo as deities responsible for poetic inspiration.<sup>13</sup>

This image of Parnassus, with its geographical and mythological features, was well known during the late-antique and medieval periods.<sup>14</sup> In the *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, a massive encyclopaedic text from the beginning of the seventh century which was extremely popular during the Middle Ages, Isidore of Seville describes Parnassus in these words:

Parnasus mons Thessaliae iuxta Boeotiam qui gemino vertice est erectum in caelum. Hic in duo finditur iuga: cyrrham et Nissam; unde et nuncupatus; eo quod in singulis iugis colebantur Apollo et Liber. Haec iuga a duobus fratribus Cithaeron et Helicon appellantur. Nam Helicon dictus ab Helicone fratre Cythaeronis. (*Etymologiarum libri* XIV, 8, 11)

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<sup>12</sup> Persius, *Satires*, *prol.* 1-3.

<sup>13</sup> It is not by chance that in Persius' prologue, the reference to Parnassus is followed by an allusion to the Muses, defined as 'Heliconidas' ('Heliconidasque pallidamque Pirenen / illis remitto quorum imagines lambent / hederæ sequaces', Persius, *Satires*, *prol.* 4-6). Daughters of Jupiter and Mnemosyne (Memoria), they nine Muses were worshipped in classical culture as protectors of the arts and guardians of memory, and often invoked by poets with a request for poetic inspiration. Hesiod is the first to depict the nine sisters on Mount Helicon, establishing a tradition that lasted for centuries (*Theogony*, 1-115). More information about the cult of the Muses will be provided in Chapter 1. The connections between Apollo and the Muses, and between Parnassus and Helicon, had consequences for the medieval reception of this mythological imagery, as I will show in the course of Chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup> Between the fourth and the fifth centuries, references to Parnassus can be found, for example, in Claudian's *In Rufinum* (*praef.* 5), where the poet mentions Apollo's battle against the snake Python, in Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (I, 11; VI, 651), where Apollo is described as the inhabitant of Parnassus, and in Macrobius' *Saturnalia* (I, 18, 3-6), still in connection with the cult of Apollo and Bacchus.

Many other medieval encyclopaedists refer to Parnassus in similar terms, mentioning its height, its two peaks, and its connection with the cult of Bacchus and, especially, Apollo.<sup>15</sup> Parnassus was also known during the Middle Ages from the commentaries on classical texts, which referred to the mountain as the setting of some significant myths, mainly connected with the figure of the Delphic god. All these texts, however, focus on the topographical elements of Parnassus, in some cases with errors and ambiguity that caused a certain confusion among medieval authors, as I will discuss in the course of this thesis. The metaphorical association between poetry and Parnassus does not seem particularly popular during the Middle Ages. With a few exceptions, in medieval texts Parnassus appears more as a place than as a concept.<sup>16</sup> This means that when Dante links the *Commedia* to Parnassus in *Paradiso* I, he is contributing to the elaboration of a series of metaphors about the classical mountain of poetry which open a ‘completely new chapter in the history of its concept and depiction’, shaping an idea of Parnassus that has lasted until today.<sup>17</sup>

Lines 16-18 of *Paradiso* I have been the subject of several discussions in Dante studies about the correct identification of the two peaks of the mountain, which brought to light some of the

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, *Papias Vocabulista* from the eleventh century: ‘Parnasus mons Thessaliae: cuius duo sunt iuga: Cirrha et Nysa in quibus singulis Apollo colebatur et Liber’. See also the etymology of the name ‘Parnasus’ provided by Ugiccone da Pisa in his *Derivationes* (from the twelfth century): ‘et hic componitur Parnasus, quidam mons, quia pares habet nasos, idest duas elations, scilicet Eliconem et Citeronem; et hunc divitur hic nasus quia est elatum’ (*Derivationes*, N, 57, 56).

<sup>16</sup> In the seventh century, reworking Persius’ prologue, Aldhelm opens his *Aenigmata* by rejecting the Muses and Parnassus: ‘Castalidas nimphas non clamo cantibus istuc / examen neque spargebat mihi nectar in ore; / cynthi sic numquam perlustro cacuminal, sed nec / in parnasso procubui nec somnia vidi’ (*Aenigmata*, *prae*f. 15-16). As Ernst Robert Curtius explains in his pivotal study on European medieval literature (Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), first publ. as *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: Francke, 1948), pp. 235-37), the rejection of the classical sources of inspiration (such as the Muses and Apollo) was a *topos* typical of early Christian literature, used by Christian poets to define their authorial identity in contrast to their pagan antecedents. Curtius also shows how this tendency vanishes with time and how Parnassian imagery is gradually readmitted into Christian poetry. From the eighth and ninth centuries onwards, there are several examples of Christian poets mentioning Apollo and the Muses in a positive way, as supporters of their poetry. It is enough here to remember that, in the twelfth century, Alain de Lille opens his *Anticlaudianus* with a reference to Apollo and the nine sisters, asking to drink from the waters of poetic inspiration (*Anticlaudianus*, *prol.*, 1-19). However, explicit references to Parnassus as a metaphor for poetry are not common (Alexander Neckam, *Carmina minora* I, 118 and John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* I, III, 60 are some of the few examples of allusions to Parnassus in this specific sense).

<sup>17</sup> Schröter, ‘Parnassus’, col. 303.

problems of the medieval reception of Parnassian imagery during the Middle Ages.<sup>18</sup> The main trend, however, is to simply read Dante's allusion to the classical mountain of poetry as a rhetorical device aimed at asserting the increased poetic challenge represented by *Paradiso*, compared to the previous cantiche. While this interpretation clearly brings into focus a significant part of Dante's statement, it also has the defect of looking at the image of Parnassus as a single occurrence in the context of this specific canto. Little attention has been paid to the fact that this is not the only reference to the mountain of poetry in the poem and that, if analysed from a wider perspective, the meanings conveyed by this classical image may be much wider and have a much deeper impact on Dante's self-fashioning as a poet.

Parnassus is explicitly mentioned four times in the *Commedia*. Its name appears for the first time in *Purgatorio* XXII, in the course of a dialogue between Statius and Virgil in which the author of the *Thebaid* claims his artistic and spiritual debt to Virgil: 'tu prima m'inviaisti / verso Parnaso a ber ne le sue grotte / e prima appresso Dio m'alluminasti' (lines 64-66). The second and the third references to the mountain of poetry appear in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise. First, explaining to Dante the nature and the mysteries of the garden of Eden, Matelda refers to the dreams of the ancient poets on Mount Parnassus, stating that 'Quelli ch'anticamente poetaro / l'età de l'oro e suo stato felice / forse in Parnaso esto loco sognaro' (*Purgatorio* XXVIII, 139-41). Then, a few cantos later, surrendering to the ineffability of Beatrice's smile, Dante mentions Parnassus' springs, stating that no poet would be able to depict Beatrice's appearance even if inspired by the waters that pour from the mountain: 'Chi palido si fece sotto l'ombra / sì di Parnaso, o bevve in sua cisterna, / che non paresse aver la mente ingombra' (*Purgatorio* XXXI, 140-42). Finally, Parnassus is mentioned in the invocation to Apollo of *Paradiso* I, in a context in which Dante is asking for a higher form of poetic inspiration. Moreover, as I show in the course of this thesis, each of these references is surrounded by a series of other allusions to Parnassian myths, deities and themes that makes the presence of Parnassian imagery in the *Commedia* much more complex and relevant than what Dante scholarship has detected so far. The reference to Parnassus at the beginning of the third cantica is only the last stage of a process of appropriation and re-elaboration of certain images that takes place in the course of *Purgatorio* and in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise in particular.

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<sup>18</sup> For the scholarly discussion on this tercet, see Enrico Proto, 'Dante e i poeti latini. Contributo di nuovi riscontri alla *Divina Commedia*', *Atene e Roma*, 13 (1910), 79-103; Enzo Mandruzzato, 'Cirra, Nisa e i "due gioghi" danteschi', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 151 (1974) 72-76; Violetta De Angelis, "'...e l'ultimo Lucano'". A more detailed analysis of the interpretive problems of this tercet (with the relevant bibliography) will be provided in Chapter 4.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the figures, the myths and the tropes connected to Parnassus within the *Commedia*, to put them in relation to one another, and to bring to light a carefully planned system of references that Dante employs to define his idea of poetry through a dialogue with the poetry of classical authors. The field of studies into the relationship between Dante and classical literature is vast and many scholars, especially from the 1980s onwards, have underlined the importance of Dante's conversation with pagan texts in order to define his own authorial identity, through positive comparisons and radical oppositions.<sup>19</sup> A portion of these studies was aimed at defining the modalities of Dante's re-use of classical mythology in the *Commedia* in the light of the moralising and allegorising interpretations of classical myths that appeared during the Middle Ages, and highlighting Dante's figural or anti-figural employment of certain images within his poem.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the groundbreaking studies of Robert Hollander in *Il Virgilio dantesco: tragedia nella 'Commedia'* (Florence: Olschki, 1983) and the contributions in the aforementioned volume *The Poetry of Allusion. Virgil and Ovid in Dante's 'Commedia'*. Also particularly relevant to this issue are the studies contained in *Dante e la 'bella scola' della poesia. Autorità e sfida poetica*, and in Paola Rigo, *Memoria classica e memoria biblica in Dante* (Florence: Olschki, 1993). The work of Michelangelo Picone (whose essays are now collected in Michelangelo Picone, *Scritti danteschi*, ed. by Antonio Lanza (Ravenna: Longo, 2017)) and of Claudia Villa (in Claudia Villa, *La protervia di Beatrice. Studi per la biblioteca di Dante* (Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2009)) have been a fundamental point of reference for this research. For the investigation of Dante's relationship with classical texts, the studies of Stefano Carrai (in Stefano Carrai, *Dante e l'antico. L'emulazione dei classici nella 'Commedia'* (Florence-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2012)) and the contributions in the volume *Sognare il Parnaso. Dante e il ritorno delle Muse*, ed. by Claudia Villa (Ravenna: Longo, 2017) are also of vital importance.

<sup>20</sup> Many of these contributions are focused on Dante's re-use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as the main source of classical mythology during the Middle Ages, but the mechanisms of re-elaboration and re-contextualisation that emerge from these studies on Ovidian myths are applicable to any other classical text. It is worth mentioning, in this respect, the early research of Robert Hollander on *Paradiso* (Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969) and of Bodo Güthmüller on *Inferno* (Bodo Güthmüller, 'Der Mythos der Metamorphose in Dantes 'Hölle'', in Bodo Güthmüller, *Studien zur antiken Mythologie in der italienische Renaissance* (Weinheim: VCH, 1986), pp. 3-17). On the relationship with the *Metamorphoses*, Michelangelo Picone's studies (*Scritti danteschi*) are still of central importance, as well as the contributions in the volume *Dante and Ovid: Essays in Intertextuality*, ed. by Madison U. Sowell (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance texts & studies, 1991). Further readings of the re-elaboration of some specific Ovidian figures in the *Commedia*, which shed light on Dante's approach to classical myths in general, can be found in Giuseppe Ledda, 'Semele e Narciso: miti ovidiani della visione nella *Commedia* di Dante', in *Le 'Metamorfosi' di Ovidio nella letteratura tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. by Gian Mario Anselmi and Marta Guerra (Bologna: Gedit, 2006), pp. 17-40, and Giuseppe Ledda, 'I miti ovidiani (e la sapienza di Stazio) nella cornice dei golosi', in *Tutto il lume de la spera nostra'. Studi per Marco Ariani*, ed. by Giuseppe Crimi and Luca Marcozzi (Rome: Salerno, 2018), pp. 95-106.

The present research will employ those methodological approaches but will proceed by analysing a group of references to classical imagery that have never been studied as part of a cohesive unit. Further, I will propose a line of interpretation focused on the concept of integration and re-contextualisation, rather than overcoming, of pagan models. Through an examination of these references in the context of the *Commedia*, in relation to the texts of Latin *auctores*, and in the light of medieval encyclopaedias and commentaries on classical texts, I intend to provide a full picture of Dante's re-use of Parnassian imagery in the *Commedia*.

My aim is to show how Dante's allusions to Parnassian myths and *topoi* form a carefully thoughtout system, designed by Dante to convey a series of reflections on the relationship between pagan texts and Christian truth and to guide the reader of the *Commedia* through the process of assimilation of classical texts within the poem, signaling the different stages of Dante's poetic development. I will point out how the greater part of this delicate process of re-elaboration happens in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, identified by many Dante scholars as a transitional space and a turning point for Dante's spiritual and artistic growth.<sup>21</sup> My reflections on Dante's representation of the garden of Eden will take into account research on the medieval imagination integrating that research with new exegetical tools offered by geocriticism.<sup>22</sup> In the light of these observations, I

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<sup>21</sup> On the idea and depiction of the Earthly Paradise during the Middle Ages, see Arturo Graf, 'Il mito del Paradiso Terrestre', in *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del Medio Evo*, 2 vols (Turin: Loescher, 1892-93), I (1892), pp. 1-238; Howard R. Patch, *The Other World: According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); Jaques Le Goff, *La naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981); Alessandro Scafi, *Il paradiso in terra: mappe del giardino dell'Eden* (Milan: Mondadori, 2007). On Dante's re-elaboration of medieval sources and on his personal representation of the garden of Eden, see, among others, Edoardo Coli, *Il Paradiso Terrestre dantesco* (Florence: Carnesecchi, 1897); Bruno Nardi, 'Il mito dell'Eden', in Bruno Nardi, *Saggi di filosofia dantesca* (Milan-Genoa-Rome-Naples: Soc. Ed. Dante Alighieri, 1930), pp. 347-74; Andrea Ciotti, 'Paradiso Terrestre', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 7 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970-78), IV (1973), 289-91; Barbara Zandrino, 'La divina foresta spessa e viva', *Lecture classensi*, 8 (1979), 45-62; Robert Hollander, 'Qualche appunto sull'Eden dantesco. Una *lectura* di *Purgatorio* XXVIII e XXIX', in *Letteratura e filologia tra Svizzera e Italia. Studi in onore di Guglielmo Gorni*, ed. by Maria Antonietta Terzoli, Alberto Asor Rosa and Giorgio Inglese, 3 vols (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2010), I, 239-56; Olga Sedakova, 'Canti XXVII-XXVIII-XXIX. Il Paradiso terrestre e il dono della poesia', in *Esperimenti danteschi. Purgatorio 2009*, ed. by Benedetta Quadrio (Genoa-Milan; Marietti, 2010), pp. 273-94. Additional bibliography on Dante's Eden, with references to specific *lecturae* of the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, will be provided in Chapter 2.

<sup>22</sup> I refer, in particular, to studies such of those of Bertrand Westphal and Robert Tally (see, for example, Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. by Robert Tally (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), first publ. as *La Géocritique: Réel, Fiction, Espace* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2007); Bertrand Westphal, *The Plausible World: A*

will propose a comparison between Dante's Edenic landscape and some elements of the classical representation of Parnassus, suggesting a potential overlap between these two places (or rather these two ideas) in Dante's imagination.

My analysis investigates the allusions to Parnassus in the *Commedia* in the order in which they appear. Chapter 1 is devoted to the analysis of Parnassian imagery in *Purgatorio* XXII. Before this point, references to Parnassian tropes and myths are very sporadic and limited to the invocations to the Muses in *Inferno* II, *Inferno* XXXII and *Purgatorio* I.<sup>23</sup> *Purgatorio* XXII not only contains the first explicit mention of Parnassus (lines 64-66) but also insists on the image of the mountain of poetry (lines 104-05), referring to the Muses as well (lines 58, 102-105). After a brief analysis of the scholarly discussion on *Purgatorio* XXII, I reflect on the function of Parnassian references in this crucial passage of the poem. I show that the image of Parnassus in this canto conveys two fundamental lines of inquiry. The first revolves around the relationship between pagan texts and Christian revelation. The presence of myths and tropes connected to the classical mountain of poetry seems to foster a series of considerations on the modalities of reading and interpreting a text and on the (potentially) prophetic content of classical poetry. The second regards the representation of poetic inspiration as food (or rather drink) for the human intellect, which involves a series of lexical choices that suggest a connection between pagan literature and Christian wisdom, linking the classical image of the springs of poetic inspiration to the biblical motif of sapiential thirst.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the cantos of the Earthly Paradise and show how the two main lines of reflection conveyed by the presence of Parnassus in *Purgatorio* XXII are taken up and fully developed in the garden of Eden. Chapter 2 revolves around Matelda's mention of Parnassus in *Purgatorio* XXVIII. The first section of the chapter is devoted to an overview of the main features of Dante's Eden, pointing to the presence of a strong classical intertextuality, both in the depiction

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*Geocritical Approach to Space, Place and Maps*, trans. by Amy D. Wells (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013); Robert Tally, *Spatiality* (New York: Routledge, 2013)).

<sup>23</sup> I will refer to these invocations (especially the invocation of *Purgatorio* I) in the course of this thesis. The analysis of the invocations to the Muses in Dante's poem, which puts the *Commedia* in the wake of a long literary tradition, would require a separate study. I decided not to include these passages in my dissertation (unless they contain an explicit mention of Parnassus) because they form a separate system that should be investigated in its rhetorical and thematic aspects beyond the examination of Parnassian references in the poem. The current research will be focused on Dante's re-elaboration of the image of the mountain of poetry, on the tropes connected to this place, and on the myths directly connected with Parnassus. The relevant bibliography on the invocations to the Muses in the *Commedia* will be provided in the course of the thesis.

of the Earthly Paradise and in the description of Matelda's appearance, and suggesting a potential connection between the Parnassian and Edenic landscapes. In the second part of the chapter, I analyse the meaning, implications and potential sources of Matelda's words at lines 139-41. I reflect on the relationship between poetry and prophecy that emerges from this tercet, connecting this passage to the observations developed in the previous chapter. Finally, I offer some remarks on the debated allusion to Themis in *Purgatorio* XXXIII (lines 46-48), showing how this reference could once again evoke an idea of Parnassus connected with poetry, prophecy and with the correct interpretation of classical texts.

Chapter 3 is devoted to a comparison between the waters of poetic inspiration, which traditionally flowed from the classical mountain of poetry, and Dante's Edenic rivers. I start with an analysis of the invocation to Urania in *Purgatorio* XXIX, 37-42, which contains a reference to the springs of Helicon (often misunderstood as being a part of Parnassus during the Middle Ages). I then move to a study of Dante's reference to Parnassus' 'cisterna' in *Purgatorio* XXXI, 139-45, reflecting on his re-elaboration of the classical image of the poet drinking from the sources of poetic inspiration. By analysing these two references in the context of the Earthly Paradise and in relation to other passages of the poem, I intend to highlight Dante's insistence on the semantic field of water in the last section of *Purgatorio*. This insistence allows us to see a connection between the classical *topos* of Parnassian springs and the theme of Dante's thirst for knowledge that runs through the *Commedia*. Following the development of this interaction from *Purgatorio* XXII to the end of the cantica, it is possible to recognise the evolution of Dante's poetry and of the relationship between classical literature and Christian wisdom. In the last section of the chapter, I show how the references to Parnassus' waters are closely intertwined with the representation of Dante's Edenic rivers, Lethe and Eunoe. Drawing on an analysis of Dante's potential sources and on some ancient and modern interpretations of the two Edenic rivers (especially Eunoe), I highlight the presence of a subtle but persistent connection between Edenic and Parnassian elements in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, and I suggest that the image of Parnassus may have played a role in Dante's depiction of the garden of Eden, both in descriptive and conceptual terms.

Finally, Chapter 4 examines the invocation to Apollo at the beginning of *Paradiso* I. The first part of the chapter is devoted to the contextualisation of this passage and to the analysis of Dante's reference to the two peaks of Parnassus at lines 16-18. I offer a summary of the main interpretive problems connected to this tercet and I propose an interpretation of 'l'un giogo di Parnaso' based on the confused but homogeneous representation of the mountain of poetry in medieval commentaries and encyclopaedias. In the second part of the chapter, I offer some

reflections on the figure of Apollo, providing an overview of the medieval interpretations of the Delphic god and suggesting a reading of this mythological figure based not only on Christian allegorisations but also on Dante's re-elaboration of Parnassian imagery in the course of the second cantica, and in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise in particular.

The results of this research provide a full understanding of Dante's re-use of a group of myths and images that have a strong metapoetic component but that have never been connected to one another in a transversal system that would link different cantos and different passages of the poem. This analysis reveals a network of references that intentionally accompany Dante's definition of the relationship between pagan texts and the poetry of the *Commedia*, and – consequently – his own self-representation as an author. Bringing to light this carefully woven web of Parnassian allusions and reflecting on the modalities of Dante's re-elaboration of this specific element of classical mythology will help us understand how Dante shapes his role as poet and prophet, and the part that classical literature plays in this process.

The fact that the reworking of Parnassian tropes is concentrated in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise confirms the importance of this crucial juncture of the poem in the transition between the earthly and the heavenly dimension of Dante's journey. The strong presence of Parnassian imagery at the end of *Purgatorio* invites us to reflect on Dante's construction of his garden of Eden, on the potential interactions between pagan and Christian concepts, and on the relationship between Dante's path to Heaven and his (classical) aspiration to poetic glory and immortality. In April 1341, Petrarch was crowned poet in Rome and delivered a speech (the *Collatio laureationis*) that is considered the manifesto of the Renaissance and which revolves around the image of the arduous ascent of Mount Parnassus. While the relationship between the poet and classical texts changes completely in the space of a few decades and the intentions of these two authors are quite different, we cannot ignore the role played by Dante in the process of re-elaboration of an idea that became the symbol of the humanistic culture.

## CHAPTER 1

### ‘TU PRIMA M’INVIASTI / VERSO PARNASO A BER NE LE SUE GROTTI’:

#### PARNASSIAN IMAGERY AND METAPOETIC THOUGHT IN *PURGATORIO* XXII

As mentioned in the Introduction to the thesis, this research begins with the analysis of *Purgatorio* XXII. In the course of this canto, we find not only the first explicit reference to Parnassus but also a series of interconnected references to Parnassian imagery that appear within the space of a few tercets and, for the first time, outside the codified context of the invocations.<sup>1</sup> Before this moment, myths and tropes connected to Parnassus do not seem to play a significant role in the poem. With the exception of the two invocations to the Muses in *Inferno* II, 7-9 and *Inferno* XXXII, 10-12, we do not find traces of this mythological imagery in the first cantica, and references to Parnassian deities and images are sporadic in the first part of *Purgatorio* as well.<sup>2</sup> It is only from *Purgatorio* XXII onwards that this specific mythological unit becomes more present in the poem. From this moment on, Parnassian images seem to point to one another, establishing a dialogue between different cantos and guiding the reader towards a series of metapoetic reflections that are fundamental for the understanding of Dante’s poetry, of its relationship with classical texts and of its role in the Christian world. As I will show in the course of this thesis, the cantos of the Earthly Paradise are particularly rich in Parnassian references and therefore particularly important for the definition of Dante’s role as a poet in the transition between an earthly and a heavenly dimension. However, the main thematic lines conveyed by the presence of Parnassus are already all on display in *Purgatorio* XXII, where the classical mountain of poetry is mentioned for the first time. In this chapter, I will show how the appearance of Parnassus is prepared by Dante and surrounded by a series of other

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<sup>1</sup> As anticipated, before *Purgatorio* XXII we only find traces of Parnassian imagery in the first three invocations of the poem, all addressed to the Muses (*Inferno* II, 7, *Inferno* XXXII, 10-12 and *Purgatorio* I, 7-12). I will refer more extensively to these invocations (especially that in *Purgatorio*) in Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the invocation to the Muses in *Purgatorio* I, 7-12, we find only two isolated references to mythological figures connected to Parnassus before *Purgatorio* XXII. The first is in *Purgatorio* XII, 31-33, when Dante refers to Apollo, Minerva, Mars and Jupiter fighting against the Giants (‘Vedeo Timbreo, vedeo Pallade e Marte, / armati ancora, intorno al padre loro, / mirar le membra d’i Giganti sparte’). In this case Apollo and Minerva, two deities that – as I will show in the course of this thesis – are connected to the mountain of poetry in different ways, are depicted in a completely different setting that has nothing to do with Parnassus or artistic inspiration. The second reference is in *Purgatorio* XX, 130-32, when Dante recalls Apollo’s birth on Delos (‘Certo non si scoteo sì forte Delo, / pria che Latona in lei facesse ’l nido / a parturir li due occhi del cielo’). I will look more closely at this second reference in the course of this chapter.

mythological references that amplify the symbolic presence of the mountain in this canto, and I will pinpoint a series of themes and images that anticipate – or rather begin – a discourse about poetry that will be fully developed in the last cantos of *Purgatorio*, along the shores of Lethe and Eunoe.

## 1.1 THE CONTEXT: *PURGATORIO* XXII AND CHRISTIAN HERMENEUTICS

Before approaching the analysis of the first reference to Parnassus, it is worth remembering the role of *Purgatorio* XXII in the *Commedia*. This canto marks a pivotal moment in Dante's path as a character and as an author. In the previous canto, on the fifth terrace of Purgatory, Dante and Virgil have met the purified soul of Statius, who, having cleansed his tendency towards sin, is ready to ascend to Heaven. At the end of the canto, Statius has introduced himself and expressed his admiration for Virgil, thus setting the framework for an important dialogue between the two Latin poets which takes place in *Purgatorio* XXII. The scholarly discussion on this canto (considered, together with the previous one, as part of a diptych) is extensive. Much has been written about the figure of Statius and his relationship with Christianity, about the role of Virgil, Dante's classical models, and the connection between faith and pagan texts.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt that this is one of

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<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the canto, especially in relation to the figure of Statius in the poem, see, among others, John H. Whitfield, 'Dante and Statius: *Purgatorio* XXI-XXII', in *Dante Soundings*, ed. by David Nolan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1981), pp. 113-29; Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, 'Stazio', in Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, *L'ombra di Argo. Studi sulla Commedia* (Turin: Genesi, 1988), pp. 285-312; Christopher A. Kleinhenz, 'Virgil, Statius, and Dante: An Unusual Trinity', in *Lectura Dantis Newberryana*, ed. by Paolo Cerchi and Antonio C. Mastrobuono, 2 vols (Evanston: North-western University Press, 1988-1990), I (1988), 37-55, and Christopher A. Kleinhenz, 'The Celebration of Poetry: A Reading of *Purgatorio* 22', *Dante Studies: with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, 103 (1991), 21-42; Ettore Paratore, 'Canto XXII', in *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana*, ed. by Pompeo Giannantonio, 3 vols (Naples: Loffredo, 1986-2000), II. *Purgatorio* (1989), 431-47; Ronald L. Martinez, 'Dante and the Two Canons: Statius in Virgil's Footsteps (*Purgatorio* XXI-XXII)', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 32 (1995), 151-75; Michelangelo Picone, 'Canto XXII', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*, II. *Purgatorio* (2001), 333-51; Marco Ariani, 'Canti XXI-XXII. La dolce sapienza di Stazio', in *Esperimenti danteschi. Purgatorio 2009*, ed. by Benedetta Quadrio (Genoa-Milan: Marietti, 2010), pp. 197-224; Arturo De Vivo, 'Canto XXII. "Per te poeta fui, per te cristiano"', in *Lectura Dantis Romana*, II. *Purgatorio. Canti XVIII-XXXIII* (2014), 652-86 (on the figure of Statius in these cantos see also, in the same volume, Andrea Battistini, 'Canto XXI. La vocazione poetica di Stazio', pp. 621-51). On the specific problem of Statius' Christianity (and its potential sources) see Teodolinda Barolini, 'Epic resolution', in Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's poets: Textuality and Truth in the 'Comedy'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 188-286 (pp. 256-69); Giorgio Brugnoli, 'Stazio in Dante', *Cultura neolatina*, 29 (1969), 117-25; Giorgio Brugnoli, 'Statius Christianus', *Italianistica. Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 17, 1 (1988), 9-15; Clive S. Lewis, 'Dante's Statius',

the most important episodes of the entire poem as regards Dante's evolving idea of poetry itself. Here, I will recall the principal aspects of the scholarly discussion regarding *Purgatorio* XXII that can help us understand the presence of Parnassus in this specific passage of the *Commedia*. My aim is to show how the references to Parnassian imagery in this canto cannot be read separately but must be conceived as part of a wider system that goes far beyond the narrative of *Purgatorio* XXII and the conversation between two Latin *auctores*. I will argue that Dante's insistence on this specific element of classical mythology is not only aimed at underlining the metapoetic content of the canto but also serves to build a reflection on his Christian poetry that will be taken up and expanded at the end of the cantica.

The first part of *Purgatorio* XXII (lines 1-114) is devoted to the dialogue between Virgil and Statius, in which the author of the *Thebaid* discusses his double conversion, from sin to virtue and from paganism to Christianity.<sup>4</sup> Both these explanations are directed at answering Virgil's questions and correcting his imperfect understanding of the truth, the 'vere ragion che son nascose' behind appearances (lines 28-30). When Virgil shows himself surprised by Statius' connection with avarice, Statius explains that it was the opposite vice – prodigality – for which he atoned on the fourth terrace of Purgatory (lines 34-36). He also adds that he abandoned this inclination only after reading (and correctly interpreting) Virgil's text:

E se non fosse ch'io drizzai mia cura,  
 quand'io intesi là dove tu chiami,  
 crucciato quasi a l'umana natura:  
 'Perché non reggi tu, o sacra fame  
 de l'oro, l'appetito de' mortali?',  
 voltando sentirei le giostre grame.  
 Allor m'accorsi che troppo aprir l'ali  
 potean le mani a spendere, e pente' mi  
 così di quel come de li altri mali. (*Purgatorio* XXII, 37-45)

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*Medium Aevum*, 25 (1956), 133-39; Luca Carlo Rossi, 'Prospezioni filologiche per lo Stazio di Dante', in *Dante e la 'bella scola' della poesia*, pp. 205-224; Giorgio Padoan, 'Il mito di Teseo e il cristianesimo di Stazio', *Lettere italiane*, 11 (1959), 432-57; Ettore Paratore, 'Stazio', in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 6 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970-1978), v (1976), 419-25.

<sup>4</sup> For some reflections on the structure of *Purgatorio* XXII and the relationship between its diegetic and dialogic parts, see Picone, 'Canto XXII', pp. 34-35.

Statius refers here to a passage from the third book of the *Aeneid*, when Virgil denounces the avarice that led Polymestor to kill Polydorus: ‘Quid non mortalia pectora cogis / auri sacra fames?’ (lines 56-57). The meaning of Virgil’s text is clearly different from the translation offered by Dante in *Purgatorio* XXII. While Virgil is condemning human avarice (‘auri fames’) defining it as ‘sacer’ (in the negative sense of damned, cursed), Dante’s Statius reads these verses as a call for moderation and self-control. In Dante’s text, ‘sacra’ has a positive meaning. The adjective identifies the right attitude towards earthly goods, which should regulate human behavior. The Latin *cogere*, used by Virgil to express the idea of pushing, is translated here with the verb *reggere*, in the sense of guiding and controlling. The interpretation of this passage has troubled Dante commentators for centuries. Although many scholars, up to recent times, have tried to force the meaning of Dante’s verses in order to put them in line with Virgil’s text, the majority of Dante’s interpreters now seem to agree in considering this mistranslation as intentional.<sup>5</sup> In the fourteenth century, one of the early commentators on the *Commedia*, Francesco da Buti, already argued that it was common praxis for medieval authors to use quotations out of their context and interpret them according to different needs:

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<sup>5</sup> In the twentieth century, Natalino Sapegno found it hard to believe that Dante misread Virgil’s text and unlikely that he voluntarily changed the meaning of Virgil’s verses. In his commentary on the *Commedia*, he proposed to read lines 40-41 as: ‘to what end, o cursed hunger for gold / do you drive the appetite of mortals?’. Charles Singleton offers the same interpretation of the passage and, according to this reading, the Petrocchi edition of the *Commedia* has ‘per che’ instead of ‘perché’ at line 40. However, this interpretation forces the meaning of both the adjective ‘sacra’, which is read as ‘cursed’, and of the verb ‘reggi’, which is interpreted as ‘to drive’ instead of ‘to govern’. See also, in this respect, the entries of the *Enciclopedia dantesca*: Luigi Blasucci, ‘reggere’, in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, IV (1973), 876-77, and Alessandro Niccoli, ‘sacro’, in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, IV (1973), 1066-67. For an opposite approach to this problem and the idea of Dante’s voluntary mistranslation of Virgil’s text see, among others, Robert Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco*, pp. 86-89; Richard A. Shoaf, “‘Auri sacra fames’ and the Age of Gold (*Purg.* XXII, 40-41 and 148-150)”, *Dante Studies: with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, 96 (1978), 195-199; Teodolinda Barolini, ‘Epic Resolution,’ pp. 259-61; Simone Marchesi, ‘Intentio auctoris tra *Purgatorio* XXII e *Convivio*. Poesia ed ermeneutica dantesca in movimento’, in *Leggere Dante*, ed. by Lucia Battaglia Ricci (Ravenna: Longo, 2003), pp. 57-72; Saverio Bellomo, “‘Or sé tu quel Virgilio?’ Ma quale Virgilio?”, *L’Alighieri. Rassegna Dantesca*, 47 (2016), 5-18. The edition of the *Commedia* by Giorgio Inglese, following this line of interpretation, reintroduces ‘perché’ instead of Petrocchi’s ‘per che’ at line 40 (see Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, ed. by Giorgio Inglese, 3 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 2021)). The text of *Purgatorio* XXII, 40 that I cite in this dissertation follows Inglese’s edition.

E per tanto si può dubitare come l'autore nostro abbia ora presa la ditta autorità in altro modo di parlare. A che si può rispondere che li autori usano l'altrui autorità arrearle a loro sentenza, quando commodamente vi si possano arrecare, non ostante che colui che l'ha ditta l'abbia posta in altra sentenza. (Francesco da Buti, on *Purgatorio* XXII, 25-54)

Francesco da Buti's statement offers an elegant encapsulation of the medieval approach to classical literature. As the French poet and theologian Alain de Lille states at the end of the twelfth century, 'Auctoritas cereum habet nasum, id est in diversum potest flecti sensum'.<sup>6</sup> Christian exegetes could easily stretch and twist the original meaning of a text according to their new eschatological framework. In this episode of the *Commedia*, what led Statius towards salvation was not the original meaning of Virgil's text but Statius' personal reading of those verses.

From the very beginning of Statius' speech, at lines 28-30, it is clear that the entire canto revolves around a problem of Christian hermeneutics.<sup>7</sup> As Christopher Kleinhenz points out in his analysis of *Purgatorio* XXII, the entire canto 'is concerned with texts – biblical and pagan – and how they are read and interpreted'.<sup>8</sup> What is more, canto XXII is concerned with the act of reading and interpreting texts regardless of their author's original intention. Simone Marchesi offers a reading of the canto based on the opposition between two different approaches to literary texts. The first one is tied to the original *intentio auctoris* and relies on the literal meaning of a text. The second one allows for a process of active interpretation, a collaboration between the reader and the text itself that can bring to light new meanings and unveil a truth that goes far beyond the author's intention. In presenting Statius' story – Marchesi argues – Dante makes a clear statement about the approach

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<sup>6</sup> Alain de Lille, *Contra hereticos libri quatuor*, I, 30. On the concept of *auctoritas* in the Middle Ages see Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1988) (see, in particular, pp. 10-15); Birger Munk Olsen, *I classici nel canone scolastico altomedievale* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1991); Michelangelo Picone, 'Dante e il canone degli *auctores*', *Rassegna europea di letteratura italiana*, 1 (1993), 9-26; Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of the Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> 'Veramente più volte appaion cose / che danno a dubitar falsa materia / per le vere ragion che son nascose' (*Purgatorio* XXII, 28-30).

<sup>8</sup> Kleinhenz, 'The Celebration of Poetry', p. 22.

to classical texts he chooses and proposes to his readers.<sup>9</sup> Dante seems to suggest that, as far as pagan literature is concerned, the truth resides in the act of reading rather than in the original act of writing. The real value of classical texts dwells in their interpretation, rather than in authorial intention.

In *Purgatorio* XXII, Statius' capacity to engage in an active dialogue with the text of the *Aeneid* allows him to see beyond the *littera* and eventually guides him to a moral conversion. The same hermeneutic mechanism is at the basis of his spiritual conversion to Christianity. After Statius' account of the nature of his sin and the reason for his repentance, Virgil asks him a second question concerning his faith. At lines 55-63, the author of the 'buccolici carmi' asks Statius when and how he became a Christian, since there is no trace of his faith in the verses of the *Thebaid* ('per quello che Cliò teco li tasta', line 58). Once again, Virgil proves himself unable to see 'le vere ragion che son nascose'.<sup>10</sup> At lines 77-93, Statius recalls the circumstances of his conversion and explains that there is no trace of Christianity in his poem because he was frightened of the persecutions and continued to profess paganism even after he was baptised ('ma per paura chiuso cristian fu' mi', line 90).<sup>11</sup> He also confesses that it was another of Virgil's texts which guided him towards Christian faith:

Facesti come quei che va di notte,  
che porta il lume dietro e sé non giova,

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<sup>9</sup> Marchesi also compares this canto of the *Commedia* with some sections of the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio*, showing Dante's change of perspective in the passage from the prosimetrum to the poem. See Simone Marchesi, '*Intentio auctoris tra Purgatorio XXII e Convivio*', pp. 65-72.

<sup>10</sup> According to Marchesi, Virgil appeals to the verses of the *Thebaid* but, unlike Statius, falls exactly into the error of sticking to the literal meaning of a text without being able to go beyond the surface ('*Intentio auctoris tra Purgatorio XXII e Convivio*', pp. 63-64).

<sup>11</sup> I would like briefly to stress the fact that there are no medieval sources for Statius' Christianity. Dante's idea of Statius' conversion is absolutely original and therefore particularly significant. The problem of Statius' conversion has always puzzled the interpreters of the *Commedia*, who have provided multiple explanations and hinted at many potential sources. Some scholars have looked at the text of the *Thebaid* in search of passages that could have been interpreted in an allegorical way during the Middle Ages. See, for example, Lewis, 'Dante's Statius', and Padoan, 'Il mito di Teseo e il cristianesimo di Stazio'. Other scholars prefer to consider Statius' Christianity as part of Dante's original re-elaboration of this figure and to reflect on the function that this conversion plays in the *Commedia*, especially in relation to Virgil (see, among others, Barolini, 'Epic Resolution'; Brugnoli, 'Stazio in Dante'; Alessandro Ronconi, 'L'incontro di Stazio e Virgilio', *Cultura e scuola* 13-14 (1965), 566-71).

ma dopo sé fa le persone dotte,  
quando dicesti: 'Secol si rinova;  
torna giustizia e primo tempo umano,  
e progenie scende da ciel nova'. (*Purgatorio* XXII, 67-72)

The text Statius is quoting at lines 70-71 is the famous passage from the fourth *Eclogue* where Virgil talks about the birth of a child connected with Augustus' circle and the return of the Golden Age and the virgin Astrea, the goddess of justice: 'Magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo / iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna; / iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto'.<sup>12</sup> The messianic interpretation of this passage was fairly widespread among medieval exegetes, who could easily read these verses as a reference to the Virgin Mary and the birth of Christ. However, there was no consensus on whether or not Virgil was aware of the Christian content of his own text. While some believed him to be a Christian *ante litteram*, others were more skeptical about his faith. Augustine, for example, claims that Virgil was inspired by the Sibyl and that, while the oracle foresaw the advent of Christ, Virgil wrote about it without being aware of the true meaning of his words.<sup>13</sup> Jerome maintains a similar position in *Epistles* 53, 7, where he refuses to think of Virgil as a Christian purely based on these verses from the fourth *Eclogue*.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, the idea of Virgil as an unconscious prophet was not new among medieval exegetes and commentators. When Benvenuto da Imola glosses this passage of the *Commedia* in the late fourteenth century, he proves himself to be perfectly aware of the ambiguity of Virgil's text but ultimately prefers to read the beginning of the fourth *Eclogue* as a reference to Augustus, rather than Christ.<sup>15</sup> The image of the torch bearer that emerges from Statius' words in *Purgatorio* XXII is

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<sup>12</sup> *Eclogues* IV, 5-7. Much has been written about the medieval interpretation of Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*. For a recent overview of this passage's exegesis during the Middle Ages and in later centuries see Luke Houghton, *Virgil's Fourth Eclogue in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 173-326.

<sup>13</sup> *De civitate Dei* X, 27: 'Nam utique non hoc a se ipso se dixisse Vergilius in eclogae ipsius quarto ferme versu indicat, ubi ait: Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas; unde hoc a Cumaea Sibylla dictum esse incunctanter apparet'.

<sup>14</sup> *Epistles* LIII, 7, 7

<sup>15</sup> See Benvenuto da Imola's comment on *Purgatorio* XXII, 74-81: 'si consonava ai nuovi predicanti, scilicet, apostolis, qui dicebant Christum virgine natum: et vere verba Virgilio satis videntur consona fidei; tamen credo quod potius intelligat de Augusto quam de Christo'. A few lines earlier, commenting on *Purgatorio* XXII, 64-73, he also points out the medieval habit of interpreting classical texts in an allegorical way: 'Et hic nota quod unusquisque conatur reducere alta dicta sapientum placentium sibi ad saniolem intellectum, sicut egregie facit Proba, quae multa dicta tam Homeri quam Virgilii reduxit placide in obsequium fidei christianae'. For further reflections on Benvenuto's commentary on

therefore in line with some medieval interpretations of Virgil's poem.<sup>16</sup> Once again, the power of Virgil's text resides in its interpretation, in the reader's ability to look for the truth hidden behind the *littera*.<sup>17</sup> By stressing Virgil's unawareness of the true meaning of his own words, Dante can draw attention to the process and the importance of allegorical interpretation.

This is the key to medieval hermeneutics and the core of Dante's approach to his classical models. As Michelangelo Picone acutely remarks, Christian readings of classical literature do not say something 'accanto' (beside the text), but 'sopra' (above the text).<sup>18</sup> And this *translatio* of the meaning, this shift from a literal to an allegorical sense, can lead towards salvation. The correct interpretation of the *littera* contained in the works of pagan authors can open the way to God, as long as it is read and understood in the new light of Christian revelation. This canto, with the story of Statius' double conversion, is a perfect example of how Christian hermeneutics could allow a reconciliation between the texts of pagan poets and the Bible. Here, Dante is reflecting on his own relationship with the works of classical *auctores* and offering his point of view on one of the main metapoetic features of the entire *Commedia*, namely the connection between poetry and salvation. In so doing, we may add, he is also shaping his own role as a new Christian poet, capable of integrating and re-contextualising the works of pagan authors within a new hermeneutic framework, and ready to offer a new kind of writing that does not need to be allegorically interpreted to reveal its salvific potential. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, when Dante opens the third cantica with an invocation to Apollo, the reuse of Parnassian images points precisely in this direction, defining the new prophetic poetry of *Paradiso*.

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this canto and his interpretation of the figure of Statius in the *Commedia*, see Giorgio Brugnoli, 'Lo Stazio di Dante in Benvenuto', in *Benvenuto da Imola lettore degli antichi e dei moderni. Atti del Convegno Internazionale. Imola, 26 e 27 maggio 1989*, ed. by Pantaleo Palmieri and Carlo Paolazzi (Ravenna: Longo, 1991), pp. 127-38, and De Angelis, 'Benvenuto e Stazio', in *Benvenuto da Imola lettore degli antichi e dei moderni*, pp. 139-64.

<sup>16</sup> For some observations on the image of the torch bearer in the light of a comparison with Augustine's texts see Olga Grlic, 'Dante's Statius and Augustine: Intertextuality in Conversionary Narrative', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 21 (1994), 73-84.

<sup>17</sup> Once again, this interpretative process is part of a dialogue between the reader and the text from which the authorial intention remains excluded. Virgil was unaware of the truth hidden behind his verses because he did not have the tools to conceive that truth. In this canto, the opposition between Statius' salvation and Virgil's damnation is particularly strong. This is one of the episodes in which Virgil's failure is most evident, despite (and also because of) the celebration of his poetry. For a comprehensive analysis of Virgil's tragic destiny in Dante's poem see Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco*.

<sup>18</sup> See Picone, 'Canto XXI', p. 342.

It is against this complex background that Parnassus is mentioned for the first time in the poem. When Statius states his poetic and spiritual debt to Virgil, he expresses his gratitude with these words:

Ed elli a lui: 'Tu prima m'inviaſti,  
verso Parnaso a ber ne le sue grotte,  
e prima appresso Dio m'alluminasti'. (*Purgatorio* XXII, 64-66)

This is the first occurrence of the word 'Parnaso' in the entire poem, and it comes from the character who perfectly embodies the point of contact between classical literature and the Christian world. The aim of this chapter is to show how the presence of the mountain of poetry in *Purgatorio* XXII directs the reader's attention to a series of themes – from the interpretation of classical texts to the motif of sapiential thirst – that will link this passage of the poem directly to the cantos of the Earthly Paradise. Before moving to these considerations, however, it will be useful to look at what comes before this specific tercet in order to unveil some connections that have not been analysed as part of the same mythological unit so far. While this may be the first occurrence of the word 'Parnaso', I would argue that the appearance of Parnassian imagery in the poem is heralded two cantos earlier, when the first sign of Statius' presence in the *Commedia* is announced by a reference to the birth of Apollo, the main god associated with Parnassus in classical mythology.

## 1.2. BEFORE *PURGATORIO* XXII: APOLLO AND THE MEANING OF DELOS

When Virgil and Dante are walking on the fifth terrace of Purgatory, immediately after the dialogue with Hugh Capet in *Purgatorio* XX, a violent and mysterious earthquake shakes the mountain, followed by the singing of the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. In the following canto, Statius himself explains that normal atmospheric phenomena do not take place on the mountain of Purgatory and that these earthquakes happen for supernatural reasons, when a soul is finally ready to ascend to Heaven.<sup>19</sup> In this specific case, the earthquake that Virgil and Dante witnessed was caused by Statius' completion of his process of purification, after 'cinquecent'anni e più' of making amends

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<sup>19</sup> According to medieval physics, earthquakes were caused by the sudden emission of vapours trapped underground.

on the fifth terrace of Purgatory.<sup>20</sup> In *Purgatorio* XX, however, the pilgrim and his guide are still unaware of these circumstances, and the earthquake is presented as a frightening event which resembles the tremors of the island of Delos:

Certo non si scoteo sì forte Delo,  
pria che Latona in lei facesse 'l nido  
a parturir li due occhi del cielo. (*Purgatorio* XX, 130-32)

According to classical mythology, Leto was struggling to find a place safe from Juno's rage in which to give birth to Apollo and Diana, her children by Jupiter ('li due occhi del cielo', to use Dante's words). Finally, she found shelter on Delos, a floating island at the mercy of the waves that was often shaken by tremors.<sup>21</sup> It was Apollo himself who then anchored the island to the bottom of the sea as a sign of gratitude.<sup>22</sup> The reference to Delos at this point of the poem is particularly interesting if we take into account the allegorical meaning that medieval mythographers attributed to Apollo's native island.<sup>23</sup> In medieval exegesis, the figure of Apollo was interpreted in many different ways, depending on which aspect of the classical cult of the god was being privileged. I will talk more extensively about the allegorical meanings of the Delphic god in the fourth chapter of this thesis. For now, I will briefly anticipate that one of the main features of the medieval

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<sup>20</sup> See *Purgatorio* XXI, 43-72. To this we should add the time spent on the fourth terrace of Purgatory for being a 'chiuso cristian' ('e questa tepidezza il quarto cerchio / cerchiar mi fé più che 'l quarto centesimo', *Purgatorio* XXII, 92-93).

<sup>21</sup> Accounts of Apollo's birth can be found in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VI, 186-92, Hyginus, *Fabulae* 53, 140 and Servius' commentary on *Aeneid* III, 73.

<sup>22</sup> See Virgil, *Aeneid* III, 73-77 ('sacra [...] gratissima tellus / Nereidum matri et Neptuno Aegeo / quam prius Arquitenens oras et litora circum / errantem Mycono e celsa Gyaroque revinxit / immotamque coli dedit et contemnere ventos') and Servius' commentary on *Aeneid* III, 73, which rationalistically explains the island's movements as earthquakes ('Nam haec insula cum terrae motu laboraret, qui fit sub terries latentibus ventis, sicut Lucanus III 460, quaerentem erumpere ventum credidit, oraculo Apollinis terrae motu caruit'). The same reference to the island's earthquakes can be found in the *Vatican Mythographers* (I, 37; II, 17; III, 8, 3). For Apollo's gratitude towards the island see also Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VI, 188-91: 'nec caelo nec humo nec aquis dea vestra [Leto] recepta est: / exsul erat mundi, donec miserata vagantem / "hospita tu terris erras, ego" dixit "in undis", / instabilemque locum Delos dedit'.

<sup>23</sup> Dante's mention of the island of Delos in *Purgatorio* XX has not received much attention among Dante scholars so far. For some useful observations on this reference, in the context of Ovidian intertextuality and in relation to the episode of Niobe (remembered by Dante in *Purgatorio* XII, 37), see Giuseppe Ledda, 'I miti ovidiani (e la sapienza di Stazio) nella cornice dei golosi', in *Tutto il lume de la spera nostra. Studi per Marco Ariani*, ed. by Giuseppe Crimi and Luca Marozzi (Rome: Salerno, 2018), pp. 95-106.

depiction of Apollo was connected with the idea of enlightenment. Apollo was the deity who illuminates the darkness with his rays.<sup>24</sup> His ancestral fight against the snake Python was interpreted as the battle between *veritas* and false belief.<sup>25</sup> For these reasons, the Delphic god was also linked to the act of interpreting, as a symbol of hermeneutic clarity which dissipates the shadows of a text and shows its true meaning. In her thorough analysis of the reception of the figure of Apollo in the English Middle Ages, Jamie Fumo points out a series of medieval texts that confirm this identification between Apollo and the exegetical process.<sup>26</sup> John of Garland, for example, in his thirteenth-century allegorisation of the *Metamorphoses*, introduces his interpretive work as a process that, like Apollo's rays, 'ratificat nebulas' of Ovid's text.<sup>27</sup> In very similar terms, in the *Tractatus de commensurabilitate vel incommensurabilitate motuum celi* (a cosmological French treatise from the fourteenth century), Nicole Oresme pictures Apollo as 'veritas actor eterne et defensor invicte', and adds 'te decet erroris efflare nebulas et obscuras ignorantie mentis tenebras effigare ut studiosis ingenii veri splendor irradiet'.<sup>28</sup>

Within this framework, the etymology of Delos was interpreted by medieval mythographers as meaning 'something that becomes evident' (from the Greek *δηλόω*, which means to show). The text of the first *Vatican Mythographer* provides an example of this:

Ut autem Delos primo Ortygia diceretur, factum est a coturnice, quae graece OPTYX uocatur; Delus autem, quia diu latuit et postea apparuit; nam delon Graeci manifestum dicunt. Vel, quod uerius fuit, quia cum ubique Apollinis responsa

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Fulgentius, *Mythologiarum libri tres* I, 12: 'Hunc etiam diuinationis deum uoluerunt, siue quod sol omnia obscura manifestat in lucem seu quod in suo processu et occasu eius orbita multimodis significationum monstret effectus'.

<sup>25</sup> The medieval interpretation of the combat between Apollo and Python will also be analysed more in depth in Chapter 4.

<sup>26</sup> Jamie Fumo, *The Legacy of Apollo: Antiquity, Authority and Chaucerian Poetics* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2016). For the image of Apollo as interpreter (or as an allegory of interpretation) see pp. 117-23. See also the observations on the representations of Apollo in Macrobius' *Saturnalia* in Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 3 vols (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994-2015), I (1994), 82.

<sup>27</sup> *Integumenta Ovidii* I, 7-8.

<sup>28</sup> See Nicole Oresme and the *Kinematics of Circular Motion: Tractatus de commensurabilitate vel incommensurabilitate motuum celi*, ed. by Edward Grant (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), pp. 288-89.

obscura sint, manifesta illic responsa dantur. Delos autem et civitas dicitur et <in>sula;  
unde interdum recipit praepositionem. (*Mythographus Vaticanus* I, 1, 37)<sup>29</sup>

Here, the mythographer is reporting the legend according to which Asteria, Leto's sister, turned herself into a quail to escape from Jupiter's amorous attention. In her panic, however, she fell into the sea and Jupiter, moved with compassion, decided to turn her into an island (Ortygia, from the Greek word for 'quail').<sup>30</sup> It is here that Leto found shelter when she was pregnant with Diana and Apollo. Since the island was hidden between the waves before Leto's arrival and only became visible after the gods' birth, it was renamed Delos.<sup>31</sup> The name of Apollo's island itself is therefore linked to the idea of something hidden that is suddenly made visible, of an uncovered reality, an enlightened truth. Moreover, the first *Vatican Mythographer* claims that Apollo's oracles, usually obscure and hard to understand, were surprisingly clear in his Delian sanctuary. The same version of the myth is confirmed by the text of the third *Vatican Mythographer*:

Dicitur Apollo Delius, id est declaratio, quia sol omnia illuminat, sive a Delo insula, in qua natus est. [...] Nam Greci Delon id est manifestum dicunt; vel ut verius putatur, quia cum unique responsa illius sint obscura, illic manifesta dabantur oracular.  
(*Mythographus Vaticanus* III, 8, 3)

It is therefore likely that, for a medieval reader, Dante's recall of Delos' earthquakes implicitly came with this mythological and interpretive background, somehow connected with the process of unveiling hidden truths or – to use a different expression – going beyond the *littera*. The fact that the figure of Statius, who first mentions Parnassus in the poem, is introduced by a reference to the place of birth of the Parnassian deity par excellence, is worthy of note. However, the fact that this

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<sup>29</sup> See also *Mythographus Vaticanus* II, 27: 'Ut autem Delos primo Ortygia diceretur, factum est a coturnice que Grece ὄρτυξ uocatur, Delos autem uocatur quia diu latuit et post apparuit, nam delon Grece manifestum dicitur, uel quod uerius est, quia cum ubique Apollinis responsa obscura sint, manifesta illic dantur oracula'.

<sup>30</sup> See also Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Between the sixth and the seventh centuries, the encyclopaedist Isidore of Seville reports a slightly different explanation, linking Delos' name to the fact that it was the first island that became visible again after the great deluge: 'Et dicta Delos fertur, quod post diluvium, quod Ogygi temporibus notator, cum orbem multis mensibus continua nox inumbrasset, ante omnes terras radiis solis inluminata est' (*Etymologiarum libri* XIV, VI, 21. This etymology, however, still appears connected with the idea of something that is illuminated by the sun and suddenly becomes visible.

reference might contain an allusion to Apollo's connection with the idea of interpretation is even more remarkable considering Statius' centrality in the reflection on hermeneutics presented in *Purgatorio* XXII. Alone, this relationship between Statius and Delos, which is established even before the reader (and the pilgrim) are aware of Statius' presence on the mountain of Purgatory, may not seem particularly significant. In a broader context, however, it acquires a completely different relevance, as it might be read as a subtle anticipation of some fundamental themes that will be raised by Statius later in the cantica. After taking into account the medieval allegorical interpretations of the isle of Delos, the reference to Apollo's birth at this point of the poem might implicitly pave the way for a reflection about the potentially salvific effects of hermeneutics and about the role of classical texts in the context of Dante's *Commedia*. If we look at this quick allusion to Delos retrospectively, it can be considered as part of a wider system of references to Parnassian myths and deities that, as I will show in the course of this thesis, point to some specific metapoetic arguments in different parts of the poem. To go back to where this chapter started, it is exactly in terms of system that we shall look at the appearance of Parnassus in *Purgatorio* XXII. As I will show in the next section of this chapter, Statius' mention of the classical mountain of poetry at line 65 is not an isolated reference to Parnassian imagery in this canto.

### 1.3 PARNASSUS AND THE NINE MUSES

The first allusion to Parnassian imagery in *Purgatorio* XXII is at lines 54-60. After Statius has answered Virgil's first question ('come poté trovar dentro al tuo seno / loco avarizia', lines 22-23), explaining his tendency towards excessive prodigality and his conversion from sin to virtue, the author of the *Aeneid* asks for some clarifications about Statius' faith, which did not emerge from his works:

‘Or, quando tu cantasti le crude armi  
della doppia trestizia di Giocasta’,  
disse ’l cantor de’ buccolici carmi,  
‘per quello che Cliò teco lì tasta  
non par che ti facesse ancor fedele  
la fede, senza qual ben far non basta’. (*Purgatorio* XXII, 54-60)

In these lines, Virgil refers to Statius' texts mentioning Clio, one of the nine Muses. The story of the Muses in Western literature is long and complex but, before moving on with the analysis of *Purgatorio* XXII, it is worth providing a brief summary of this story and looking at the presence of these deities in Dante's *Commedia*, as some of the Parnassian references that will be analysed in the course of this thesis also involve the figure of the nine sisters.

According to classical mythology, the Muses were the traditional goddesses of the Arts, protectors of knowledge and memory, who had watched over poets since the time of Homer.<sup>32</sup> While the *Iliad* opens with an invocation to a generic goddess,<sup>33</sup> in the first line of the *Odyssey* this deity is explicitly called 'Μοῦσα' (Muse).<sup>34</sup> The first complete catalogue of the Muses, with their exact number and names, dates back to Hesiod's *Theogony*. In the proem of this work (lines 1-115), Hesiod identifies the Muses as daughters of Zeus (Jupiter) and Mnemosyne (Memory) and calls them Clio, Euterpe, Thalia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polyhymnia, Urania and Calliope.<sup>35</sup> He also claims that, since the day of their birth, they have gladdened and celebrated the gods with their songs, and granted men poetic inspiration. With these characteristics, the Muses are involved in literary invocations throughout classical antiquity.<sup>36</sup> Calliope and Urania certainly had a leading

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<sup>32</sup> The origin of the cult of the Muses as patrons of art and poetry is hard to reconstruct. At the beginning, they were probably conceived as deities similar to nymphs, particularly connected with mountains and waters. It is likely that, in the temple dedicated to the Muses, people used to perform poems to celebrate Jupiter's victory over the Titans and that their sphere of competence gradually migrated towards poetry. See Otto Kern, *Die Religion der Griechen I. Von Anfängen bis Hesiod* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1926), pp. 208-09; Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature*, p. 229. For a broader analysis of the ancient cult of the Muses see Christine Walde, 'Muses', in *Brill's New Pauly, Antiquity*, IX (2006), 322-25.

<sup>33</sup> Μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος / οὐλομένην [...] (*Iliad* I 1-2).

<sup>34</sup> Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον [...] (*Odyssey* I 1).

<sup>35</sup> *Theogony* I, 75-79.

<sup>36</sup> For a more complete outline of the story of the Muses in the literary tradition see Curtius, *European Literature*, pp. 228-46; Tanja Kupke, 'Ou sont les Muses d'antan? Notes for a Study of the Muses in the Middle Ages', in *From Athens to Chartres. Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeuneau*, ed. by Haijo J. Westra (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 421-436; Caterina Babino, 'Introduzione allo studio del culto delle Muse tra Tardo Antico e Medioevo', *Schola Salernitana. Annali*, 16 (2011), 33-50. For a wider picture of the re-elaboration of pagan deities (including the Muses) during the Middle Ages, see Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods. The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, trans. by Barbara F. Sessions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), first publ. as *La survivance des dieux antiques* (London: Warburg Institute, 1940); Peter Dronke, 'Gli dei pagani nella poesia latina medievale', in *Gli umanesimi medievali. Atti del II Congresso dell'Internationales Mittellateinerkomitee*, Firenze, Certosa del Galluzzo, 11-15 settembre 1993, ed. by Claudio Leonardi (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1998), pp. 97-110.

role and a more defined character, but each Muse was gradually associated with a specific literary genre, as eventually emerges from this late-antique mnemonic poem collected in the *Anthologia Latina*:

Clio saecula retro memorat sermone soluto.  
Euterpae geminis loquitur cava tibia ventis.  
Voce Thalia cluens soccis dea comica gaudet.  
Melpomene reboans tragicis fervescit iambis.  
Aurea Terpsichorae totam lyra personat aethram.  
Fila premens digitis Erato modulamina fingit.  
Flectitur in faciles variosque Polymnia motus.  
Uranie numeris scrutatur sidera mundi.  
Calliope doctis dat laurea sarta poetis. (*Anthologia latina* 76)

In the works of Latin authors, the Muses were usually invoked in the opening section of the poem, as well as before textual junctures that were considered critical from a stylistic or a thematic point of view.<sup>37</sup> Virgil, for example, invokes the Muses in the proem of his *Aeneid* ('Musa, mihi causas memora')<sup>38</sup> but also in the ninth book of the poem, just before recalling Turnus' assault on the Trojan army ('Vos, o Calliope, precor, aspirate canenti, / qua stibi tum ferro strages, quae funera Turnus / ediderit, quem quisque virum demiserit Orco').<sup>39</sup> In general, the presence of the Muses became a *topos* in Latin literature and the nine goddesses were invoked by poets in every kind of literary genre, sometimes flanked – but not replaced – by other deities (such as Apollo and Jupiter) or by powerful human figures, such as the emperor.<sup>40</sup>

From a geographical point of view, the Muses were traditionally depicted as inhabiting Helicon, a mountain range located in central Greece.<sup>41</sup> One of the first encounters between the poet and the Muses in Western literature, described in the proem of Hesiod's *Theogony*, happens on

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<sup>37</sup> As regards the second (or multiple) *invocatio*, see again Curtius, *European Literature*, p. 231, and Gian Biagio Conte, 'Proemi al mezzo', in Gian Biagio Conte, *Virgilio. Il genere e i suoi confini* (Milan: Garzanti, 1984), pp. 121-33.

<sup>38</sup> *Aeneid* I, 8.

<sup>39</sup> *Aeneid* IX, 525-27. But see also *Aeneid* VII, 37-45 and *Georgics* IV, 315-16.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Ovid's invocation to Jupiter in *Metamorphoses* X 148-51, or Virgil's invocation to the 'Caesar' in the proem of the *Georgics* (I, 24-42).

<sup>41</sup> See Klaus Freitag, 'Helicon', in *Brill's New Pauly, Antiquity*, VI (2005), 69-70.

Mount Helicon itself.<sup>42</sup> This association between Helicon and the nine sisters is still alive in Latin literature, when Virgil writes ‘Pandite nunc Heliconae, deae, cantusque movete’,<sup>43</sup> or when Ovid describes the meeting between Minerva and the Muses in the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses* (‘virgineumque Helicon petiit’).<sup>44</sup> However, over the centuries (and especially from late antiquity onwards), the distinction between Helicon and Parnassus gradually fades. The similarity of these two places, both connected to poetry and wisdom, and the fact that Apollo and the Muses were often depicted and invoked together by poets,<sup>45</sup> probably caused a conflation between the two mountains in late antique imagery. As I will discuss more extensively in the next chapters, by the time Dante is writing, Helicon was probably identified as part of Parnassus itself and that is the reason why some of the allusions to Parnassus examined in the course of this thesis also include a reference to the nine goddesses of the Arts.

In the passage from pagan to Christian literature, the attitude towards the Muses went through many stages. The first Christian poets tended to be cautious in referring to the Muses and they preferred to replace them with Christian entities when asking for poetic inspiration.<sup>46</sup> In some cases, this tendency was even more radical and led Christian authors to an explicit rejection of the Muses, which meant a rejection of pagan poetry in general. Between the fourth and the fifth centuries, for example, we read in Bishop Paulinus of Nola’s *Poemata*, ‘Negant Camenis nec patent Apollini / dicata Christo pectora’.<sup>47</sup> In this poem, Paulinus admits that he was fascinated by the Muses and Apollo in his youth, but also adds that there is no space for them in a Christian text. Elsewhere, he states that he no longer needs the Muses, defined as empty ghosts, or a deaf Apollo: ‘Non ego Castalidas, vatum phantasmata, Musas / nec surdum Aonia Phoebum de rupe ciebo’.<sup>48</sup> Similar rejections of the Muses were common in early Christian literature and constituted a *topos* by means of which Christian authors affirmed their identity and emancipation from pagan

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<sup>42</sup> *Theogony* I, 1-4.

<sup>43</sup> *Aeneid* VII, 641.

<sup>44</sup> *Metamorphoses* V, 254. I will talk more extensively about this passage from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in Chapter 3.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Statius, *Thebaid* VIII, 373-374 (‘Sed iam bella vocant: alias nova suggere vires, / Calliope, maiorque chelyn mihi tendat Apollo’) and Horace, *Ars poetica*, 406-07 (‘ne forte pudori / sit tibi Musa lyra sollers et cantor Apollo’).

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, the preface of Juvenius’ *Evangelicae Historiae*, where the author invokes the Holy Spirit: ‘Ergo age! Sanctificus adsit mihi carminis auctor / Spiritus, et puro mentem riget amne canentis / dulcis Jordanis, ut Christo digna loquantur’ (*Evangelicae Historiae*, praef. 33-34).

<sup>47</sup> Paulinus of Nola, *Poemata* X, 21-22.

<sup>48</sup> *Poemata* XV, 30-36

models.<sup>49</sup> Even Augustine, in his *De doctrina christiana*, casts doubt on the divinity of the Muses, reporting a euhemeristic explanation of the origin of their cult in which he states that, in the beginning, they were simply statues created by artists in competition with one another.<sup>50</sup>

Some Christian authors were less restrictive about the presence of the Muses in their works and radical rejection softened over the centuries as Christian poets gradually stopped feeling threatened by pagan literature. At the end of the sixth century, for example, the poet and bishop Venantius Fortunatus admitted the possibility for anyone to choose their personal source of inspiration: ‘Tangitur aut digito lyra tibia fistula canna: quisque suis Musis carmine mulcet alves’.<sup>51</sup> The Carolingian Renaissance of the eighth and ninth centuries gave a significant boost to the rehabilitation of the Muses in Western literature and, by the end of the twelfth century, the nine goddesses had eventually returned to their role in poetic inspiration, without compromising the Christian ideology of the texts.<sup>52</sup> The *Anticlaudianus*, an allegorical and didactical poem written by the theologian Alain de Lille in the twelfth century, which had a wide circulation during the Middle Ages, opens with an invocation to the Muses and Apollo that testifies to the integration of these deities in medieval poetry:

Scribendi novitate vetus iuvenescere carta  
gaudet, et antiquas cupiens exire latebras  
ridet, et in tenui lascivit harundine Musa.  
Fonte tuo sic, Phebe, tuum perfunde poetam,  
ut compluta tuo mens arida flumine, germen  
donet, et in fructus concludat germinis usum. (*Anticlaudianus*, *prol.*, 1-9)<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See Curtius, *European literature*, pp. 235-37.

<sup>50</sup> *De doctrina christiana* II, 17. For a similar explanation of the origin of the cult of the Muses (with the purpose of undermining their authority) see also Clement of Alexandria (*The exhortation to the Greeks*, II, 27). See also the arguments put forward by Arnobius between the third and the fourth centuries in his treatise *Adversus nationes* (III, 37), where he claims that the various and confusing amount of mythological information about the Muses must be a symptom of the absence of truth.

<sup>51</sup> *Miscellanea* VII, 8, 29-30.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Walafrid Strabo, *De visionibus Wettini*, 173-75, and Mico of St. Riquier, *Carmina de festis Christianis per dies ordinata*, XVII.

<sup>53</sup> On the possible influence of the content and structure of the *Anticlaudianus* on Dante’s *Commedia* see Cesare Vasoli, ‘Alano di Lilla’, in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, I (1970), 89-91.

The role of the Muses as patronesses of poetry, however, is not the only aspect of their cult that survived in the passage from classical to Christian literature. In the first century BC, in his *Tusculanae disputationes*, Cicero refers to a connection between the Muses and the intellectual life of men that goes beyond the purely artistic sphere: ‘cum Musis, ideas cum humanitate et cum doctrina’.<sup>54</sup> In Greek and then Latin literature, the nine sisters were considered not only patronesses of the arts but also goddesses of philosophy and wisdom.<sup>55</sup> They were responsible not only for men’s artistic talent but also for their philosophical, historical and cognitive interests, and played a crucial role in every aspect of intellectual life.<sup>56</sup> The cult of the Muses was not only connected to poetry and literature but also to the aspiration for a totalizing knowledge.<sup>57</sup> This component of the cult of the Muses survived throughout the centuries and was particularly strong in late antiquity.<sup>58</sup> Between the fourth and the fifth centuries, Martianus Capella, in the *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercuri* (an allegorical and encyclopedic prosimetrum which became very influential during the Middle Ages due to its representation of the Liberal Arts), describes the Muses as symbols of a form of knowledge that can lead to heaven.<sup>59</sup> Almost a century later, in his *Mythologiarum libri tres* (a compendium of classical myths accompanied by allegorical explanations which also became a point of reference for medieval mythography), Fulgentius interprets the nine goddesses as the nine steps towards wisdom. These are summed up as desire for learning, love for what we have learnt, comparison of it, memory of it, reflection on it, and ability to talk properly about it.<sup>60</sup> This

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<sup>54</sup> *Tusculanae disputationes* V, 66.

<sup>55</sup> When Homer invokes the Muses before the famous catalogue of ships in the second book of the *Iliad*, he asks not only for poetic inspiration but also for knowledge, addressing the nine sisters as the goddesses who know everything (‘ἵστε τε πάντα’, line 485). In the *Cratylus*, Plato states that the name of the Muses derives from ‘ἀπό τοῦ μῶσθα’ (line 406 a), namely from the verb ‘to desire, to aim for something’, referred to the pursuit of philosophical truth.

<sup>56</sup> This concept is perfectly summarised by Virgil in the second book of the *Georgics*, when he asks the Muses to help him satisfy his thirst for knowledge and to reveal to him the laws of the universe (*Georgics* II, 475-82).

<sup>57</sup> For a study of the cult of the Muses amongst philosophers, see Pierre Boyancé, *Le culte des Muses chez les philosophes grecs. Études d’histoire et de psychologie religieuses* (Paris : Éditions E. De Boccard, 1972).

<sup>58</sup> Cumont, for example, noticed that sepulchers dated between the first and fourth centuries often present images of the Muses, thus confirming their pivotal role as deities of knowledge and immortality. See Franz Cumont, ‘Les Muses’, in *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1966), pp. 253-350.

<sup>59</sup> In the *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* II, 145 the Muses accompany Philology in her ascent to heaven. In the previous book (I, 117-26), they state that Philology became worthy of her marriage with Mercury in virtue of some qualities that are precisely the traditional prerogatives attributed to the Muses.

<sup>60</sup> *Mythologiarum libri tres*, I, XV. Some later commentators on the work of Martianus Capella use Fulgentius’ allegorical interpretation to explain the passages of the *De nuptiis* which involve the Muses. See, for example, the ninth-century

interpretation of the Muses was still known in Dante's time, since it can be found in Giovanni del Virgilio's commentary on the *Metamorphoses*, probably written a few years after Dante's death.<sup>61</sup> According to this consistent tradition, we can infer that during the Middle Ages the Muses were associated not only with poetry but with a form of art which was able to ennoble men both from a moral and an intellectual point of view.

Therefore, the fact that Dante mentions the Muses in a thirteenth-century Christian poem is not surprising, neither for us nor for Dante's medieval readers. The presence of the nine sisters in the *Commedia* is part of that process of adaptation and transformation that the Muses underwent over the centuries and that led them to survive in different literatures and against different cultural backgrounds. In Dante's *Commedia*, the nine sisters are mainly involved in the context of the invocations. Like Greek, Latin and Christian authors before him, Dante invokes the poetic aid of a superior force at crucial junctures of the poem, when representing the afterworld with accuracy becomes more difficult and he needs to increase his poetic effort. I will talk more extensively about the invocations of the poem in the second and especially the third chapter of this thesis, where I will analyse Dante's addresses to the Muses in *Purgatorio*. For now, I recall the fact that there are nine invocations in the poem, two in *Inferno*, two in *Purgatorio* and five in *Paradiso*.<sup>62</sup> Of these nine invocations, unevenly distributed across the three cantiche, five are addressed to the Muses. As briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Dante opens the first cantica with a traditional invocation to the 'muse' (*Inferno* II, 7),<sup>63</sup> and then asks for their help again towards the end of the cantica, right before entering the lower section of Hell (*Inferno* XXXII, 10-12).<sup>64</sup> Similarly, he

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commentary of Remigius of Auxerre (*Commentum in Martianum Capellam* I, 19, 11) or the twelfth-century exegesis attributed to Bernardus Silvestris (*Commentum in Martianum Capellam* X, 230).

<sup>61</sup> *Allegoriae librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos*, V, 22. In this passage, Giovanni del Virgilio summarises the different allegorical interpretations of the Muses provided throughout the centuries.

<sup>62</sup> *Inferno* II, 7; *Inferno* XXXII, 10-12; *Purgatorio* I, 7-12; *Purgatorio* XXIX, 37-42; *Paradiso* I, 13-36; *Paradiso* XVIII, 82-87; *Paradiso* XXII, 112-123; *Paradiso* XXX, 97-99; *Paradiso* XXXIII, 67-75. For an analysis of the invocations of the *Commedia*, see Robert Hollander, 'The invocations of the *Commedia*', *Yearbook of Italian Studies*, 3-5 (1973-75), 236-40 (repr. in Robert Hollander, *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1980), pp. 31-38); Robert Hollander, 'Dante's nine invocations revisited', *L'Alighieri*, 41 (2013), 5-32; Giuseppe Ledda, "'Dire grandissime cose": protasi, invocazioni, indicibilità', in Giuseppe Ledda, *La guerra della lingua. Ineffabilità, retorica e narrativa nella 'Commedia' di Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2002), pp. 13-55.

<sup>63</sup> 'O muse, o alto ingegno, or m'aiutate'.

<sup>64</sup> 'Ma quelle donne aiutino il mio verso / ch'aiutaro Anfione a chiuder Tebe, / sì che dal fatto il dir non sia diverso'.

invokes the ‘sante Muse’ at the beginning of *Purgatorio* (I, 7-12)<sup>65</sup> and then again before the final section of the cantica, in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise (*Purgatorio* XXIX, 37-42).<sup>66</sup> The distribution and the addressees of the invocations of *Paradiso* are not as symmetrical, since the increasing difficulty of poetic representation leads Dante to ask for help more often and to different kinds of pagan and Christian deities. However, we find an invocation to the Muses again in *Paradiso* XVIII, 82-87, when Dante is about to describe the words drawn in the sky by the blessed souls of the Heaven of Jupiter.<sup>67</sup>

Outside the system of the invocations, the word ‘musa’ (or the plural ‘muse’) is sometimes used with a metaphorical function, as a synonym for poet,<sup>68</sup> but there are some cases in which Dante recalls the Muses in their role as goddesses of poetry with a different purpose than asking for their help and inspiration. The first time that this happens is precisely in *Purgatorio* XXII, with Virgil’s mention of Clio at line 57.<sup>69</sup> It is not the only time in the *Commedia* that a particular Muse is singled out from the other sisters. In the invocations of *Purgatorio*, Dante specifically refers to Calliope in canto I and to Urania in canto XXIX, and he also mentions Polyhymnia in *Paradiso*

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<sup>65</sup> ‘Ma qui la morta poesi resurga, / o sante Muse, poi che vostro sono; / e qui Caliopé alquanto surga, / seguitando il mio canto con quel suono / di cui le Piche misere sentiro / lo colpo tal, che disperar perdono’.

<sup>66</sup> ‘O sacrosante Vergini, se fami, / freddi e vigilie mai per voi soffersi / cagion mi sprona ch’io mercé vi chiami. / Or convien che Elicona per me versi, / e Uranie m’aiuti col suo coro / forti cose a pensar mettere in versi’.

<sup>67</sup> ‘O diva Pegaëa, che li ’ngegni / fai gloriosi e rendili longevi, / ed essi teco le cittadi e ’ regni, / illustrami di te, sì ch’io rilevi / le lor figure com’io l’ho concette: / paia tua possa in questi versi brevi!’. The other invocations of *Paradiso* are addressed to the ‘buon Apollo’ (*Paradiso* I, 13-36), the ‘gloriose stelle’ (*Paradiso* XXII, 112-23), the ‘splendor di Dio’ (*Paradiso* XXX, 97-99) and the ‘somma luce’ (*Paradiso* XXXIII, 67-75).

<sup>68</sup> See *Paradiso* XII, 7 (‘canto che tanto vince nostre muse’), *Paradiso* XV, 26 (‘se fede merta nostra maggior musa’) and *Paradiso* XVIII, 33 (‘sì ch’ogne musa ne sarebbe opima’).

<sup>69</sup> After *Purgatorio* XXII, in order to find the Muses outside the context of the invocations, we need to look at the third cantica. In *Paradiso* II, Dante warns his readers about the intellectual and spiritual challenges that they are about to face ‘sailing’ through the third cantica, and states the value and novelty of his poetic efforts. On this occasion, he claims that he is escorted on this journey by Minerva, Apollo and the Muses (‘Minerva spira, e conducemi Apollo, / e nove Muse mi dimostran l’Orse’, lines 8-9). For more observations on this specific passage, which constitutes an important step in Dante’s re-elaboration of Parnassian images in the *Commedia*, see Chapter 4. The other reference to the Muses which does not involve an invocation is right in the heart of the third cantica, in *Paradiso* XXIII, when Dante, expressing his difficulties in depicting Beatrice’s smile, states: ‘Se mo sonasser tutte quelle lingue / che Polimnìa con le suore fero / del latte lor dolcissimo più pingue, / per aiutarmi, al millesmo del vero / non si verria’ (lines 55-59).

XVIII.<sup>70</sup> In this case, as many scholars have noted, the specific reference to Clio, who was traditionally identified as the Muse of history,<sup>71</sup> can be read in the light of the Statian intertextuality that dominates the canto.<sup>72</sup> After a generic reference to the Muses as a whole, the first book of the *Thebaid* starts with an address to Clio: ‘Quem prius heroum, Clio dabis?’ (*Thebaid* I, 41). Further on, in the tenth book of his poem, Statius exclusively asks Clio to help him remember the sacrifice of young Meneceo: ‘Nunc age, quis stimulos et pulchrae gaudia mortis / addiderit iuveni (neque enim haec absentibus unquam / mens homini transmissa dei), memor incipe Clio, / saecula te quoniam penes et digesta vetustas’ (*Thebaid* X, 628-631). Considering the fact that we cannot find traces of Clio as an individual Muse in other Latin texts that are particularly significant for Dante, it is likely that her presence in *Purgatorio* XXII is due the particular connection that Statius seems to establish with the Muse of history in his work.

In the context of this canto which is so focused – as I was discussing above – on the importance of careful reading, the reference to Clio might be another factor that invites us to pay attention to the text and to its details. Dante sets up this dialogue between the two Latin *auctores* in order to suggest a specific reading practice, staging two directional readings that are similar and different at the same time, and that have a specific function within the scope of the *Commedia*. The fact that he makes Virgil mention the Muse of history in addressing Statius brings to the fore the specificity of Statius’ poetry and testifies to the attention that Virgil the character paid to the text of the *Thebaid*, the same meticulous and critical attention that Statius paid to Virgil’s work. The fact that these two careful readings lead to different outcomes (conversion on the one hand and misunderstanding on the other) lies once again in the act of interpreting the *littera* and in the choice of going beyond it or not.

#### 1.4 THE MUSES AND THE MILK OF ELOQUENCE

Virgil’s mention of Clio is not the only reference to the Muses in this canto. As anticipated above, the emergence of the image of Parnassus (at line 65) is surrounded by a series of mythological allusions that seem to insist on this specific imagery connected to the classical mountain of poetry.

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<sup>70</sup> ‘e qui Caliope alquanto surga’ (*Purgatorio* I, 9); ‘e Uranie m’aiuti col suo coro’ (*Purgatorio* XXIX, 41); ‘Polimnia con le suore’ (*Paradiso* XVIII, 56).

<sup>71</sup> See, again, the poem from the *Anthologia latina* cited above: ‘Clio saecula retro memorat sermone soluto’ (*Anthologia Latina* 76).

<sup>72</sup> For an analysis of the presence of Statian intertextuality in *Purgatorio* XXI-XXII, see again Paratore, ‘Stazio’.

After the clarifications on the modalities of his conversion to Christianity, with some fundamental statements that will be analysed in the next section of this chapter, Statius wants to know more about the after-world life of other classical authors such as Terence, Caecilius Statius, Plautus and Varro.<sup>73</sup> To this question, Virgil answers once again by referring to the nine goddesses of poetry:

‘Costoro e Persio e io e altri assai’,  
rispuose il duca mio, ‘siam con quel Greco  
che le Muse lattar più ch’altri mai,  
nel primo cinghio del carcere cieco;  
spesse fiate ragioniam del monte  
che sempre ha le nutrice nostre seco’ (*Purgatorio* XXII, 100-05)

In these lines, the Muses are depicted as wet nurses who inhabit a non-specified mountain that classical poets often talk about. The first observation to make about this passage is that the ‘monte’ that Virgil is referring to at line 104 must have been, in all likelihood, Parnassus. As anticipated in the previous section of the chapter, during the Middle Ages the distinction between Parnassus and Helicon appears to have been almost completely lost. All the early commentators on the *Commedia* agreed in identifying this mountain as Parnassus and, looking at the commentary tradition on the poem, it is interesting to notice how almost every commentator, up until contemporary times, confirmed this identification. As far as I know, only Tozer suggests that this mountain might be Helicon.<sup>74</sup> In all the other commentaries, from the fourteenth until the twenty-first century, this ‘monte’ is the same mountain mentioned by Statius at line 65, suggesting that the original distinction between Parnassus and Helicon is blurred, not only for Dante but also for his readers. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the matter of the exact identification and location of Helicon in relation to Parnassus at Dante’s time, but this passage, together with its readings, already shows that these two places cannot be analysed as separate entities in the *Commedia* and must be considered as part of the same mythological unit and of the same metapoetic discourse.

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<sup>73</sup> ‘dimmi dov’è Terrenzio nostro antico, / Cecilio e Plauto e Varro, se lo sai: / dimmi se son dannati, e in qual vico’ (lines 97-99). Of these names, the only one whose identification is still uncertain is ‘Varro’, who might be either Publius Terentius Varro or Lucius Varius Rufus, both authors from the first century BC. For some reflections on the presence of comic Latin poets in this passage, see Zymunt G. Barański, ‘Dante e la tradizione comica latina’, in *Dante e la ‘bella scola’ della poesia*, pp. 225-45.

<sup>74</sup> See his comments on *Purgatorio* XXII, 104-105.

The second element that is worthy of attention in these two tercets is the depiction of the Muses in the act of nourishing the poets with their milk. The peculiarity of this image is already suggested by Dante's use of the term 'lattar' at line 102, which, despite being a common word in the vernacular, only occurs this one time in the entire poem.<sup>75</sup> The concept is reiterated at line 105, with the definition of the Muses as 'nutrice' of ancient poets. The image of poetic inspiration presented in maternal terms already emerges in the previous canto, when Statius claims that Virgil's *Aeneid* was for him 'mamma' and 'nutrice' (*Purgatorio* XXI, 97-98). However, we can find a representation of the Muses in the same act of nourishing the poets in a completely different context, at the heart of the third cantica in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars. Here, Dante is finally allowed to look at Beatrice's smile. This vision is so intense and overwhelming that the poet cannot find the words to describe it:

Se mo sonasser tutte quelle lingue  
che Polimnïa con le suore fero  
del latte lor dolcissimo più pingue,  
per aiutarmi, al millesmo del vero  
non si verria, cantando il santo riso  
e quanto il santo aspetto facea mero. (*Paradiso* XXIII, 55-60)<sup>76</sup>

Once again, we find a picture of the Muses ('Polimnïa con le suore') nursing classical poets with their milk. The metaphor of the milk as intellectual food was quite common in Christian literature. As Ernst Robert Curtius observes, we can already find traces of this association in some biblical texts which compared newly converted Christians with babies who drink milk but are not yet able to eat solid food.<sup>77</sup> In later texts from the Fathers of the Church, milk became a metaphor for

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<sup>75</sup> See Sebastiano Aglianò, 'lattare', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, III (1971), 601.

<sup>76</sup> It is interesting to notice that this is the last reference to the Muses, and to Parnassian imagery, in the poem. In his study of the invocations of the poem, Hollander defines this passage as a 'non-invocation', aimed at stating Dante's rejection of the classical Muses in the third cantica (see Hollander, 'Dante's Nine Invocations Revisited'). Ledda disagrees and rightly points out that claiming the insufficiency of the Muses' inspiration was a rhetorical *topos* well established in classical literature as well. He prefers to interpret this passage of the *Commedia* as 'un esempio di una ben nota variante del *topos* dell'indicibilità', rather than a Christian rejection of the Muses (see Ledda, "Dire grandissime cose", pp. 41-42).

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, I Cor. 3:2, I Peter 2:2, Hebrews 5:12. See Curtius, *European Literature*, pp. 134-36.

Christian doctrine and was particularly associated with the wisdom derived from reading the Old and New Testaments, often compared to maternal breasts. We might consider, for example, the words of Ambrose in the *De patriarchis*: ‘Ubera vel duo testamenta dixit, quorum altero adnuntiatus est, altero demonstratus – et bene ubera, quoniam velut quodam nos spiritali lacte nutritos educavit et optulit deo filius’.<sup>78</sup> Augustine too writes, ‘Est autem mater Ecclesia; et ubera eius duo Testamenta Scripturarum divinarum. Hinc sugatur lac omnium sacramentorum temporaliter pro aeterna salute nostra gestorum, ut nutritus atque roboratus perveniat ad manducandum cibum’.<sup>79</sup>

Dante himself uses this metaphorical relationship between milk, sacred texts and Christian knowledge in several passages of *Paradiso*. In this respect, the studies of Gary Cestaro and Maurizio Fiorilla on Dante’s use of the metaphor of milk in the *Commedia* are particularly useful.<sup>80</sup> In the fifth canto of *Paradiso*, for example, when Beatrice denounces the levity of the Christians, she compares people who turn away from the text of the Bible to lambs who leave their mother and her milk:

Avete il novo e ’l vecchio Testamento,  
e ’l pastor de la Chiesa che vi guida;  
questo vi basti a vostro salvamento.  
  
Se mala cupidigia altro vi grida,  
uomini siate, e non pecore matte,  
sì che ’l Giudeo di voi tra voi non rida!  
  
Non fate com’agnel che lascia il latte  
de la sua madre, e semplice e lascivo  
seco medesimo a suo piacer combatte! (*Paradiso* V, 76-84)

In *Paradiso* XI, Thomas Aquinas compares the Dominican friars to lost sheep who left their fold because they became hungry for new food but who then lost their capacity to produce milk

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<sup>78</sup> *De patriarchis*, XI, 51.

<sup>79</sup> *In epistolam Joannis ad Parthos tractatus decem* III, 1.

<sup>80</sup> See Gary P. Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), and Maurizio Fiorilla, ‘La metafora del latte in Dante’, in *La metafora in Dante*, ed. by Marco Arian (Florence: Olschki, 2009), pp. 149-65. On the presence of milk in the *Commedia*, see also Sebastiano Aglianò, ‘latte’, in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, III (1971), 601

(‘tornano a l’ovil di latte vote’, line 129).<sup>81</sup> On other occasions, the image of maternal milk is used by Dante in mystical contexts. In *Paradiso* XXIII, for example, we find a nursing metaphor which evokes the image of Mary as a breastfeeding mother. The blessed are here depicted as infants who reach towards their mother after she gives them her milk:

E come fantolin che ’nver’ la mamma,  
tende le braccia, poi che ’l latte prese,  
per l’animo che ’nfin di fuor s’infiamma;  
ciascun di quei candori in sù si stese  
con la sua cima, sì che l’alto affetto  
ch’elli avieno a Maria mi fu palese. (*Paradiso* XXIII, 121-26)

And finally, at the end of the third cantica, this metaphorical relationship between love, infants and maternal milk involves Dante himself. In *Paradiso* XXX, Dante eventually reaches the Empyrean and finds himself surrounded by a stream of light, which immediately awakens Dante’s most intense desire.<sup>82</sup> Beatrice tells him that, in order to quench his thirst for knowledge, he needs to ‘drink’ from this river with his eyes.<sup>83</sup> At this point, Dante leans towards this ‘river’ with the same greed as an infant who, having awoken later than usual, now craves his mother’s milk:

Non è fantin che sì sùbito rua  
col volto verso il latte, se si svegli  
molto tardato da l’usanza sua,  
come fec’io, per far migliori specchi

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<sup>81</sup> ‘Ma ’l suo pecuglio di nova vivanda / è fatto ghiotto, sì ch’esser non puote / che per diversi salti non si spanda; / e quanto le sue pecore remote / e vagabunde più da esso vanno, / più tornano a l’ovil di latte vòte’. On this passage, see also Benvenuto da Imola’s commentary, which interpreted milk as ‘dulci doctrina, qua debent alere e cibare alios’.

<sup>82</sup> On this passage and the image of the *fons lucis*, see Marco Ariani, “‘e sì come di lei bevve la gronda / de le palpebre mie’” (*Par.* XXX 88): Dante e lo pseudo Dionigi Areopagita’, in *Leggere Dante*, pp. 131-52, and Marco Ariani, ‘*Fons lucis* e ‘lume visibile’ (canto XXX)’, in Marco Ariani, *Lux inaccessibilis. Metafore e teologia della luce nel ‘Paradiso’ di Dante* (Rome: Aracne, 2010), pp. 327-45.

<sup>83</sup> ‘ma di quest’acqua convien che tu bei / prima che tanta sete in te si sazi’ (*Paradiso* XXX, 73-74). As we will see, the recurring metaphor of sapiential thirst constitutes another fundamental element of Dante’s reflections around Parnassus. I will analyse the presence of this specific image in *Purgatorio* XXII in the next section of Chapter 1, and then again in Chapter 3 in the context of the Earthly Paradise.

ancor de li occhi, chinandomi a l'onda  
che si deriva perché vi s'immegli. (*Paradiso* XXX, 82-87)<sup>84</sup>

This connection between milk and Christian doctrine, in some cases associated with the image of the sacred texts as a vehicle to receive that spiritual food, seems therefore well established in the Christian tradition. What appears to be completely new is Dante's association of this nursing metaphor with the figure of the Muses and, therefore, with classical texts.<sup>85</sup> It is possible to identify a series of potential literary influences that might have contributed to the birth of this metaphorical association in Dante's poem. Apart from the connection between milk and Christian faith, during the Middle Ages the nursing metaphor was also associated with the semantic field of language. It is a tradition that dates back to the classical world since in the first century Quintilian already used the nursing metaphor in the context of a broader intellectual education, speaking about milk as a food for young men who just started studying rhetoric: 'Quin ipsis doctoribus hoc esse curae velim, ut teneras adhuc mentes more nutricum mollius alant et satiari velut quondam iucundioris disciplinae lactae patiantur'.<sup>86</sup>

This idea of Rhetoric nursing its students remained alive during the Middle Ages. In a study on the reception of classical authors between the twelfth and the fourteenth century, Gian Carlo Alessio and Claudia Villa pointed at a letter written by Pietro della Vigna to Nicola della Rocca in which, with the same verb used by Dante (*lactare*), Rhetoric is depicted in the act of nursing the intellectuals: 'Inter tot excelsa virorum ingenia quos in aula Cesarea fecunda rhetoricae diutius ubera lactaverunt'.<sup>87</sup> With a slight change of subject, we can find a similar image in Alaine de Lille's

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<sup>84</sup> A similar image, which involves the idea of Dante as an infant, can also be found at the end of *Paradiso*, in canto XXXIII. Here, Dante surrenders to the impossibility of describing his vision of God and says: 'Ormai sarà più corta mia favella, / pur a quel ch'io ricordo, che d'un fante / che bagni ancor la lingua a la mammella' (*Paradiso* XXXIII, 106-08). In this case, the image of the infant is connected to the topic of ineffability. Milk is not associated with Christian doctrine but appears connected with the sphere of language (which is, as we will see in the next pages, another metaphorical association typical of the semantic area of milk). For some observations on this passage, see Giuseppe Ledda, 'Invocazioni e preghiere per la poesia nel *Paradiso*', in *Pregiera e liturgia nella 'Commedia'. Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi di Ravenna, 12 novembre 2011*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Centro Dantesco dei Frati Minori Conventuali, 2013), pp. 125-54 (pp. 148-49).

<sup>85</sup> See Fiorilla's study on this specific topic ('La metafora del latte in Dante', pp. 155-61).

<sup>86</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* II, 4, 5. See Curtius, *European literature*, p. 134.

<sup>87</sup> Jean Louis Alphonse Huillard-Breholles, *Vie et correspondance de Pierre de la Vigne, ministre de L'Empereur Frédéric II : avec une étude sur le mouvement réformiste au 13<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris : H. Plon, 1985), p. 372. See Gian Carlo Alessio and Claudia Villa,

*Anticlaudianus* as well, where Grammar is represented as wet nurse.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, if we look at the *De consolatione philosophiae*, a text certainly known to Dante and fundamental for his intellectual education, we see that the same metaphor is reinterpreted by Boethius, who depicts himself as being breastfed by Philosophy: ‘Tunc ille es, ait, qui nostro quondam lacte nutritus, nostris educatus alimentis in uirilis animi robur euaseras?’.<sup>89</sup> This image of the nursing Philosophy became quite popular in later centuries and we can find it in vernacular texts such as Bono Giamboni’s *Il libro de’ vizii e delle virtù* and Guido Faba’s *Parlamenta et Epistole*.<sup>90</sup>

We can therefore assume that, in establishing a connection between the nursing metaphor and the assimilation of a doctrine that was not strictly Christian, Dante probably relied on different sources and suggestions. In addition to the texts mentioned above, we should also bear in mind the broad connection between milk and eloquence that, once again, dates back to classical antiquity and finds its most famous expression in Quintilian’s definition of Livio’s style as ‘lactea ubertas’.<sup>91</sup> Maurizio Fiorilla highlights the fact that this metaphorical association was still common during the Middle Ages and offers the example of the medieval iconographic tradition of the *lactatio Bernardi*. According to the legend, Bernard of Clairvaux was nursed by the Virgin herself, receiving from her milk not only his wisdom but also his proverbial eloquence.<sup>92</sup> As Fiorilla himself specifies, the legend had a minor circulation between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and there is no evidence to claim that Dante was actually aware of this connection between Mary’s milk and the eloquence of the *doctor mellifluus* who guides him during the very last stages of his celestial journey.

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‘Il nuovo fascino degli autori antichi tra i secoli XII e XIV’, in *Lo spazio letterario di Roma antica*, ed. by Guglielmo Cavallo, Paolo Fedeli and Andrea Giardina, 7 vols (Rome: Salerno, 1989-2012) III. *La ricezione del testo* (1990), 473-511.

<sup>88</sup> Alaine de Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, II, 390-403.

<sup>89</sup> *De consolatione philosophiae* I, 2, 2. For the metaphor of Philosophy breastfeeding the intellectuals, see Aglianò, ‘lattare’.

<sup>90</sup> Bono Giamboni, *Il libro de’ vizii e delle virtù*, IV: ‘Allora incominciai a favellare e dissi: – Maestra delle Virtudi, che vai tu facendo in tanta profondità di notte per le magioni de’ servi tuoi? – Ed ella disse: – Caro mio figliuolo, lattato dal cominciamento del mio latte, e nutricato poscia e cresciuto del mio pane, abandoneret’io, ch’io non ti venisse a guerire, veggendoti sì malamente infermato?’. Guido Faba, *Parlamenta magistri Guidonis Fabe et epistule ipsius, Responsivum parlamentum electi fratri*: ‘Questa terra luntana scì è Sena incoronata, la o’ eo son stato a li piè de la Filosofia et audito la soa doctrina e nutrito del lacte de la sua dolceça.’

<sup>91</sup> *Institutio Oratoria*, X, 32.

<sup>92</sup> See Federica Gori, ‘L’allattamento di S. Bernardo e di altri santi: spunti per una discussione’, in *Pietas e allattamento filiale: la vicenda, l’esemplum, l’iconografia. Colloquio di Urbino, 2-3 maggio 1996*, ed. by Renato Raffaelli, Roberto M. Danese and Settimio Lanciotti (Urbino: QuattroVenti, 1997) pp. 289-95. See also Fiorilla, ‘La metafora del latte in Dante’, pp. 159-60.

What is important, once again, is to identify a series of texts that testify to the persistence of certain metaphorical associations that might have played a role in Dante's imagination, but also to reflect on the specific reuse and reinterpretation of those suggestions in the *Commedia*.

In the case of *Purgatorio* XXII, the image of milk (usually employed in relation to sacred texts by Christian authors and Dante himself) is for the first time applied not only to grammar and rhetoric, but to the Muses, which means, by extension, to poetic language. On this occasion, the milk is not intended as Christian knowledge but as eloquence and poetic inspiration.<sup>93</sup> As Benvenuto da Imola notices in his comments on *Paradiso* XXIII, 55-60, when Dante mentions the Muses' milk he refers to 'doctrina et eloquentia poetica delectabilissima'. Dante seems to draw a parallel between Christian and classical knowledge, between sacred and pagan texts, even between the Muses and the Virgin Mary. Perhaps the fact that, in *Paradiso* XXIII, 'Polimnïa con le suore' and Mary are mentioned in relation to the same act of breastfeeding is not accidental. There is a precise hierarchy between these two dimensions, and *Paradiso* XXIII is quite revealing in this sense, since the inspiration granted by the Muses – their milk – appears inadequate to represent the realm of God. However, this is something that only explicitly emerges in the third cantica. It is interesting to notice that, if the metaphor of milk is mainly associated with Christian doctrine in *Paradiso*, in *Purgatorio* this nursing image only emerges in connection to the Muses and literature, as if the Muses' milk, and the classical poetic eloquence it represents, were somehow part of Dante's sapiential path, especially in the transitioning space of *Purgatorio*. Dante's lexical choices allow us to see a point of contact between pagan poetry and Christian knowledge. Within this interaction, which contains elements of both fracture and continuity, Dante defines himself as a Christian author. The whole of canto XXII of *Purgatorio*, as we are discussing, is built around this encounter, which seems to happen – metaphorically – in correspondence with Mount Parnassus.

#### 1.4 PARNASSUS' SPRINGS AND THE METAPHOR OF THIRST

It is in this context and among these references that the image of Parnassus first emerges in the poem. First, Statius' words on his own conversion bring to light some fundamental topics such as the relationship between pagan texts and Christian truth, and the importance of the right hermeneutic approach in this delicate and potentially salvific interaction. Secondly, the references

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<sup>93</sup> As previously mentioned, in *Purgatorio* XI the Old and New Testaments are temporarily replaced by the text of the *Aeneid* itself, identified by Statius as 'mamma' and 'nutrice'.

to the Muses and to the act of nourishing draw the readers' attention to the idea of poetry as food for the human intellect, establishing a connection between pagan literature and Christian wisdom.

Against this background, the appearance of Parnassus at line 65 reveals all its complexity. When Statius answers Virgil's questions about his faith, he claims that the author of the *Aeneid* was for him both a literary and a spiritual guide:

Ed elli a lui: "Tu prima m'inviaſti  
verso Parnaso a ber ne le ſue grotte,  
e prima appreſſo Dio m'alluſtinaſti". (*Purgatorio* XXII, 64-66)

The appearance in the poem of the word 'Parnaso' comes right after Virgil's allusion to Clio at line 58 and before the depiction of the Muses as wet nurses at lines 102-05. It also comes with a reference to the waters that poured from its 'grotte'. The image of the poet drinking from the springs that flow from Mount Parnassus finds its origin in classical literature. The mountain of poetry was depicted as rich in waters pouring from Castalia, a spring that comes from one of Parnassus' gorges.<sup>94</sup> References to this fountain can be found in ancient Greek literature, mainly as a periphrasis for Delphi or a simple geographical allusion.<sup>95</sup> Some Greek authors, however, already referred to the sweetness of Castalia's waters<sup>96</sup> and to the role of this spring in the purifying rituals that men needed to perform before entering the sanctuary of Delphi. In one of Euripides' tragedies, for example, the Delphians are invited to bathe in the Castalian waters in order to purify themselves before entering the temple.<sup>97</sup> As Herbert W. Parker underlines in his essay on Castalia, Euripides clearly attributes a particular purifying power and a specific ritual purpose to this spring, establishing a tradition that was echoed many centuries later in the text of the *Metamorphoses*, when in the first book of Ovid's poem Deucalion and Pyrrha clean themselves with the waters of Castalia

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<sup>94</sup> For the geographical location of Castalia, see Giovanna Daverio Rocchi, 'Castalia', in *Brill's New Pauly*, II (2003), 1176.

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Herodotus' account (*Histories* VIII, 39) and Pindar's reference to Castalia as Apollo's favourite spring (*Pythian Odes* I, 39). For a rich overview of the history of Castalia through classical literature, see Herbert W. Parker, 'Castalia', *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, 102, 1 (1978), 199-219.

<sup>96</sup> See Pausanias, *Description of Greece* X, 8, 9.

<sup>97</sup> Euripides, *Ion* 94.

before approaching 'Themis' temple on Mount Parnassus.<sup>98</sup> In another tragedy, the *Phoenissai*, Euripides pictures the act of immersing oneself in these waters as a sign of dedication to Apollo.<sup>99</sup> The god himself was sometimes depicted as bathing in the Castalian spring, according to a tradition that reached Horace's *Odes* and Statius' *Thebaid*.<sup>100</sup>

In some cases, the waters of Castalia were put in relation to poetic inspiration as well. Between the fourth and the third centuries BC, Theocritus seems the first to turn to the Castalian nymphs, who live on Mount Parnassus, because they know things about the heroes and can inspire poetry about them.<sup>101</sup> This particular connection between Parnassian springs and poetic inspiration survived in later literature and is further developed by Latin authors. Apart from some generic references to Castalia as one of the elements that characterise Parnassus' description,<sup>102</sup> many passages from Latin texts show the idea of a relationship between Parnassian waters and poetry. In the middle of the third book of the *Georgics*, for example, Virgil depicts himself as blown towards Parnassus by his love for poetry. His reference to Castalia is followed by the resolution to sing:

Sed me Parnasi deserta per ardua dulcis  
raptat amor; iuvat ire iugis, qua nulla priorum  
Castaliam molli devertitur orbita clivo.  
Nunc, veneranda Pales, magno nunc ore sonandum. (*Georgics* III, 291-94)

Virgil's text does not establish a direct link between the Castalian waters and the act of composing poetry, but the idea of being a poet seems closely connected to the act of walking on Mount Parnassus, somewhere close to its springs. In the third elegy of the third book, Propertius recalls a dream of himself lying on Mount Helicon, next to 'Bellerophonteia qua fluit umor equi'.<sup>103</sup> The Latin poet is here referring to Hippocrene, one of Helicon's springs, created by a kick from Pegasus

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<sup>98</sup> See Parker, 'Castalia', pp. 202-03. The myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha is recalled by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* I, 367-74. I will talk more extensively about this myth and its relevance to Dante in the next chapter of this thesis.

<sup>99</sup> Euripides, *Phoenician Women*, 222-24.

<sup>100</sup> In his *Odes*, Horace describes Apollo as the one 'qui rore puro Castaliae lavit, / crinis solutos' (*Odes* III, 4, 61-62). With very similar words, Statius pictures the Delphic god in the act of 'mergere crines' in the 'rore Castaliae' (*Thebaid* I, 697-98).

<sup>101</sup> Theocritus, *Idyll* VII, 148.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Ovid, *Metamorphoses* III, 14; Lucan, *Pharsalia* V, 125; Statius, *Thebaid* VIII, 175.

<sup>103</sup> Propertius, *Elegies* III, 3, 1-2.

(Bellerophon's winged horse)<sup>104</sup> and equally addressed by Latin poets as connected with inspiration. In the fifth book of his *Fasti*, for example, Ovid invokes the help of the Muses, identifying them as the goddesses who live near Hippocrene ('quae fontes Aganippidos Hippocrene [...] tenetes').<sup>105</sup> As discussed above, in some Latin texts the descriptive elements of Helicon and Parnassus start to merge, and some authors show an ambiguity when talking about these places that will later cause confusion in medieval mythography and literature (including Dante's *Commedia*). This process regards the springs of poetic inspiration as well, and sometimes Latin poets seem to refer to Castalia, Hippocrene or Aganippe (the other spring of Mount Helicon)<sup>106</sup> interchangeably. The text from the third book of Propertius' *Elegies* quoted above, for example, continues with the poet claiming that Apollo started talking to him 'ex arbore Castalia', thus showing the coexistence of Parnassian and Heliconian elements in the same passage.<sup>107</sup> What matters, in this case, is that the poet was seeking for inspiration on the mountain of poetry and precisely next to its spring of water.

Perhaps the most explicit mention of Parnassian waters as responsible for poetic inspiration can be found in Ovid's *Amores*, when the poet reaffirms his identity through a reference to Castalia:

Vilia miretur vulgus; mihi flavus Apollo  
pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua,  
sustineamque coma metuentem frigora myrtum,  
atque a sollicito multus amante legar! (*Amores*, I, XV, 35-38)

The act of drinking the waters of Castalia is clearly a metaphor for being a poet, alongside being crowned with the myrtle. A similar idea can be found in Statius' *Silvae*, where the author enumerates the springs of Parnassus and Helicon as sources of inspiration and later talks about Castalia's 'vocabulis undis', metonymically emphasizing the connection between these powerful waters and

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<sup>104</sup> See, for example, *Metamorphoses* V, 250-59.

<sup>105</sup> Ovid, *Fasti* V, 7-8.

<sup>106</sup> Aganippe presents the same poetic powers as its sister spring, Hippocrene, and Castalia. See, for example, Virgil, *Eclogues* X, 11-13: 'nam neque Parnasi vobis iuga, nam neque Pindi / ulla moram fecere, neque Aoniae Aganippe'.

<sup>107</sup> In a passage of his commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*, Servius explains the line 'Pandite nunc Helicon', correctly identifying this fountain as Hippocrene but claiming that Helicon was one of Parnassus' peaks (on *Aeneid* X, 163, 5). I will discuss this confusion in more detail in Chapter 3.

poetic eloquence.<sup>108</sup> A few centuries later, the works of Claudian still present a clear image of the act of drinking from Castalia and of the connection between Castalian waters and poetic inspiration.<sup>109</sup>

This brief overview shows that the image that Dante presents to his reader at line 65 has a very long history and can be found in the texts of some authors that were widely known during the Middle Ages. The idea of the poet drinking from the springs of Parnassus seems particularly influential in Dante's imagination, as it reappears in multiple passages that involve the mountain of poetry. As we will see, when Dante invokes the Muses in *Purgatorio* XXIX, he quotes Virgil's *Aeneid*, asking Helicon to pour its waters for him ('Or conven che Elicon per me versi', *Purgatorio* XXIX, 40).<sup>110</sup> Moreover, when he meets Beatrice in the garden of Eden and tries to describe her brightness, he states the deficiency of human words saying:

O isplendor di viva luce eterna,  
chi palido si fece sotto l'ombra  
sì di Parnaso, o bevve in sua cisterna,  
che non paresse aver la mente ingombra  
tentando a render te qual tu paresti. (*Purgatorio* XXXI, 139-43)<sup>111</sup>

Once again, the waters of Parnassus' 'cisterna' are a metaphor for poetic eloquence and inspiration. Dante seems to take up this classical *topos*, specifically insisting on the act of drinking. What is noteworthy, in the context of canto XXII, is that this classical image first emerges in the poem in a canto (or a diptych of cantos) that presents several references to the metaphor of thirst. As many scholars have noted, Statius' cantos (namely *Purgatorio* XXI and XXII) develop the theme of sapiential thirst.<sup>112</sup> Canto XXI opens with a reference to 'la sete natural che mai non sazia / se non

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<sup>108</sup> Statius, *Silvae* II, 2, 36-40; V, 5, 2. But see also Martial, who defines the Muses 'Castalis' in *Epigrams* IV, 14, 1 and refers to the benefic effects of Castalian waters in *Epigrams* IX, 18, 7-8.

<sup>109</sup> See, for example, *In Rufinum* II, *praef.*, 1-5.

<sup>110</sup> The passage from the *Aeneid* Dante is referring to is the one mentioned above in relation to Servius' commentary ('Pandite nunc Helicon', VII, 641).

<sup>111</sup> For an analysis of this passage, and of the invocation to the Muses in *Purgatorio* XXIX, see Chapter 3.

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Ariani, 'Canti XXI-XXII: la dolce sapienza di Stazio'. For the motif of sapiential thirst in Statius' cantos, see also Luca Carlo Rossi, 'Canto XXI', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*, II. *Purgatorio* (2001), 315-31 and Giorgio Inglese, 'Purgatorio XXI. La corona di Stazio', in Giorgio Inglese, *Scritti su Dante* (Rome: Carocci, 2021), pp. 171-81. On the same metaphor see Andrea Battistini, 'L'acqua della samaritana e il fuoco del poeta (*Purg.* XXI-XXII)', *Critica*

con l'acqua onde la femminetta / samaritana domandò la grazia' (lines 1-3), and this thirst for knowledge is later mitigated by Virgil's question ('si fece la mia sete men digiuna', line 39) and satisfied by Statius' answer ('e però ch'el si gode / tanto del ber quant'è grande la sete / non saprei dir quant'el mi fece prode', lines 73-75).

This motif was already outlined by Dante in the third book of the *Convivio*, where he states that, 'ciascuna cosa massimamente desidera la sua perfezione, e in quella si queta ogni suo desiderio [...]. E questo è quello desiderio che sempre ne fa parere ogni dilettazone manca: ché nulla dilettazone è sì grande in questa vita che all'anima nostra possa [sì] torre la sete' (*Convivio* III, 6, 7). However, it is in the *Commedia* that the metaphorical correspondence between thirst and desire for knowledge is fully explored. Apart from some passages in which Dante refers to thirst in a literal way or with the generic meaning of 'intense desire' and 'yearning',<sup>113</sup> the image is most often associated with intellectual curiosity. As Luca Carlo Rossi states in his reading of *Purgatorio* XXI, 'il motivo della sete sapienziale [...] è uno dei più persistenti e significativi per indicare la *curiositas* dantesca', and the act of drinking is often presented as a metaphor for gaining knowledge.<sup>114</sup> At the beginning of *Purgatorio* XVIII, for example, Dante expresses his wish to know more about the nature of love by presenting himself as 'io, cui nova sete ancor frugava' (line 4). In the Earthly Paradise, after describing the nature of the Garden of Eden, Matelda anticipates Dante's curiosity saying, 'E avvegna ch'assai possa esser sazia / la sete tua perch'io più non ti scuopra / darotti un corollario ancor per grazia' (lines 134-36).<sup>115</sup>

It is once again in the third cantica that this motif is fully developed by Dante. When in *Paradiso* X Thomas Aquinas tells Dante that he is willing to resolve his doubts, he claims that 'qual ti negasse il vin de la sua fiala / per la tua sete, in libertà non fora' (lines 88-89). The same

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*letteraria*, 20, 74 (1992), 3-25 (repr. in Andrea Battistini, *La retorica della salvezza: studi su Dante* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016), pp. 165-95.

<sup>113</sup> For the second meaning see, for example, the 'decenne sete' of meeting Beatrice again (*Purgatorio* XXXII, 2). For a list of the occurrences of the word 'sete' (both with a literal and a metaphoric meaning), see Federigo Tollemache, 'sete', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, IV (1976), 196-98.

<sup>114</sup> Rossi, 'Canto XXI', p. 316.

<sup>115</sup> Interestingly, this 'corollario' that Matelda is talking about closely concerns Parnassus: 'Quelli ch'anticamente poetaro / l'età de l'oro e suo stato felice / forse in Parnaso esto loco sognaro' (lines 139-41). The analysis of this tercet will be one of the main focuses of the next chapter. Another interesting use of the metaphor of thirst and the image of drinking as gaining wisdom can be found in relation to Dante's Edenic rivers, Lethe and Eunoe ('lo dolce ber che mai non m'avria sazio', *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 138). An analysis of the waters of Dante's Earthly Paradise and of their intersections with Parnassian imagery will be provided in Chapter 3.

representation of Dante's thirst as desire for knowledge can be found in *Paradiso* XVII, when the pilgrim is encouraged to ask his questions to Cacciaguida 'non perchè nostra conoscenza cresca / per tuo parlare, ma perché t'ausi / a dir la sete, sì che l'uom ti mesca' (lines 10-12). In *Paradiso* XXIV, the metaphor of thirst, combined with the metaphor of hunger, is used by Beatrice to represent the condition of the blessed in Heaven. Here, 'a la gran cena del benedetto Agnello',<sup>116</sup> every desire for knowledge, every 'hunger', is perpetually satisfied, and the souls constantly drink from the fountain which is the origin of those truths that Dante is seeking: 'voi bevete / sempre del fonte onde vien quel ch'ei pensa' (lines 8-9).<sup>117</sup> In *Paradiso* IV, the idea of a fountain is associated with Beatrice but still in relation to Christian wisdom. After she has solved the pilgrim's doubts about the dispositions of the souls in the Empyrean and about God's justice, Dante the author comments: 'Cotal fu l'ondeggiar del santo rio / ch'uscì del fonte ond'ogne ver deriva' (lines 115-16). As Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi suggests, it is impossible not to think about another river of eloquence that appeared at the very beginning of the poem, when the pilgrim was still lost in a 'selva oscura'.<sup>118</sup> In *Inferno* I, a stunned Dante asked Virgil: 'Or se tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte / che spandi di parlar sì largo fiume?' (lines 79-80). In the third cantica, however, this ancient metaphorical association between eloquence and a flowing river is completely re-contextualised. Beatrice's words have a completely different origin, they come directly from the source of every truth.

The very last cantos of *Paradiso* are particularly important for Dante's elaboration of the image of God as the ultimate fountain of truth. In canto XXX, Beatrice states that the only thing that can fully satisfy Dante's thirst for knowledge is Christian wisdom and, ultimately, God himself: 'ma di quest'acqua convien che tu bei / prima che tanta sete in te si sazi' (lines 73-74). It is the end

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<sup>116</sup> The metaphorical connection between supper and beatitude comes from the Bible (see, for example, Apoc. 19, 9 and Luke 14, 16-24).

<sup>117</sup> The biblical image of God as a fountain of knowledge and truth was already used by Dante in *Purgatorio* XV, when Virgil explains that the visions of meekness that the pilgrim had were meant to 'aprir lo core a l'acque de la pace / che da l'eterno fonte son diffuse' (lines 131-32). The association can be found in many passages from the Psalms and the Gospels. See, for example, Psalm 22, 2 (where God appears as the shepherd who guides his flock to the water), Psalm 35, 9-10 (with the image of God as a river which quenches people's thirst), Psalm 41, 2-3 (with another parallel between God and streams of water) and Psalm 62, 2 ('sitivit in te anima mea'). For the New Testament see, for instance, Jesus' words in John 7, 37-39: 'Si quis sitit, veniat ad me et bibat. Qui credit in me, sicut dicit Scriptura, flumina de ventre eius fluent aquae vivae'. For a longer list of biblical passages involving the metaphor of God as water, see Tollemache, 'sete'.

<sup>118</sup> See Chiavacci Leonardi on *Paradiso* IV, 115.

of a metaphorical path that has been developed throughout the entire poem and especially in the course of the second and the third cantiche. Dante the pilgrim is now approaching the ‘fine di tutt’i disii’ and is about to plunge into the only waters that have the power to quench his thirst once and for all. A few lines later in canto XXX, with an incredibly powerful evocation of synaesthesia, Dante depicts himself in the act of drinking from the river of light of the Empyrean with his own eyes:

Non è fantin che sì subito rua  
col volto verso il latte, se si svegli  
molto tardato da l’usanza sua,  
come fec’io, per far migliori spegli  
ancor de li occhi, chinandomi a l’onda  
che si deriva perché vi s’immegli;  
e sì come di lei bevve la gronda  
de le palpebre mie, così mi parve  
di sua lunghezza divenuta tonda. (*Paradiso* XXX, 82-90)

As the quote shows, the image of Dante avidly drinking from this heavenly river comes right after the reference to breastfeeding that had been analysed in the previous section of this chapter. The metaphor of thirst and that of breastfeeding are once again intertwined, as happens in *Purgatorio* XXII. The context and the meaning of these metaphors, however, have completely changed. At the end of the third cantica we find Mary, not the Muses, and she is depicted in the act of nourishing the poet with Christian wisdom rather than poetic eloquence. The water that Dante is desperate to drink does not flow from Mount Parnassus but from another ‘eterna fontana’,<sup>119</sup> which is God himself. Ultimately, Dante’s intellectual *curiositas*, all his doubts and his questions, all his desire for knowledge, find an answer in God. The fountain of Christian knowledge is the only one which can definitively quench the pilgrim’s thirst.

However, if we look at the development of the metaphor of thirst in the course of the poem, it is interesting to notice how this biblical image sometimes appears interconnected with

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<sup>119</sup> This is how Dante describes God in the following canto, *Paradiso* XXXI. After hearing Dante’s words aimed at celebrating her salvific role (lines 79-90), Beatrice smiles and then turns her gaze back to God: ‘e quella, sì lontana / come pareva, sorrise e riguardommi; / poi si tornò a l’eterna fontana’ (lines 91-93).

Parnassian tropes. The semantic area of drinking is mainly associated with Christian wisdom but presents some fundamental intersections with poetic eloquence, represented by Parnassus and its springs. As happens with the metaphor of milk and the nourishing Muses in *Purgatorio* XXII, which anticipates some images of *Paradiso* where milk is mainly associated with Mary and Christian doctrine, the metaphorical act of drinking to satisfy an intellectual thirst similarly connects the semantic areas of Christian truth and poetic inspiration. The use of a certain kind of lexicon allows us to draw a connection between Christian wisdom and classical knowledge, as if the relationship with classical literature (represented by the waters of Parnassus) was somehow part of Dante's sapiential path. These two dimensions appear intertwined, one type of knowledge contains, recontextualises, clarifies, corrects – but does not eliminate – the other.

This union is perfectly summarised by Statius' words in *Purgatorio* XXII when, in the space of a tercet, he establishes a connection between poetic vocation and Christian faith: 'tu prima m'inviaisti / verso Parnaso a ber ne le sue grotte / e prima appresso Dio m'alluminasti' (lines 64-66). There is clearly a hierarchical order between these two elements ('per te poeta fui, per te Cristiano,' continues Statius at line 73). The construction of this tercet, however, with the chiasmic structure of these two sentences, bound together by the rhyme, suggests that the two experiences are connected at a deeper level. *Purgatorio* XXII is the first canto in which the waters of Parnassian eloquence and the waters of Christian knowledge are mentioned in the context of the same metapoetic discourse, aimed at stating the potentially salvific power of classical poetry. As I will show in the next chapters, this connection emerges once again at the end of *Purgatorio*, in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, while Dante is walking along the shores of Lethe and Eunoe.

In conclusion, this analysis of *Purgatorio* XXII and of the first reference to Parnassus in the *Commedia* has already shown the main themes conveyed by the presence of Parnassian imagery in the poem. The reflection on the prophetic and – if adequately integrated – potentially salvific role of classical literature is the main issue associated with the presence of Parnassus in the *Commedia*, and this reflection fosters a series of other thoughts on the process of reading and interpreting a text and on the role of classical literature in the path of a Christian author towards wisdom. In the next chapters, I will show how these topics re-emerge in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, and precisely in correspondence with the re-emergence of Parnassian images and tropes. Chapter 2 will raise the problem of the interpretation of classical texts and of the relationship between poetry and prophecy, both in a classical and in a Christian perspective, while Chapter 3 will further explore the theme of sapiential thirst in relation to Parnassian waters and to Dante's Edenic rivers.

## CHAPTER 2

### **‘FORSE IN PARNASO ESTO LOCO SOGNARO’:**

#### **PARNASSUS AND PROPHECY IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN**

In the previous chapter, reflection on the role of Parnassian imagery in *Purgatorio* XXII showed two fundamental lines of inquiry. The first revolves around the relationship between pagan texts and Christian truth. The presence of myths and tropes connected to the classical mountain of poetry seems to foster a series of considerations on the modalities of reading and interpreting a text and on the (potentially) prophetic content of classical poetry. The second regards the representation of poetic inspiration as food (or rather, drink) for the human intellect, which involves a series of lexical choices that suggest a connection between pagan literature and Christian wisdom in the context of Dante’s sapiential path.

In the next two chapters, I will show how these two themes that are conveyed by the presence of Parnassus are taken up and fully developed in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, the section of the *Commedia* that – as I anticipated in the Introduction to my thesis – contains the majority of the poem’s references to Parnassian imagery. While many of these passages involving Parnassus have been discussed by Dante scholars on a case-by-case basis, we have yet to read these references as part of a broad, carefully planned system. My intent is to show how myths and tropes connected to the mountain of poetry are in dialogue with one another, creating a web of allusions that guide Dante’s reader through some specific junctures of the poem. I will argue that the recurrence of Parnassian myths and images in the Earthly Paradise section is neither accidental nor irrelevant. On the contrary, it plays a decisive role in Dante’s self-fashioning as a poet in the delicate passage between the earthly dimension of Purgatory and the heavenly perspective of Paradise. This net of mythological references, and their particular distribution in the last cantos of *Purgatorio*, also allows us to detect some remarkable similarities between Parnassian and Edenic landscapes. In the next chapters, I will also suggest the possibility that the classical image of Parnassus might have played a role in Dante’s shaping of his own idea of the Earthly Paradise, and that these two places might perform a very similar function in classical and Christian culture, orienting the space around them both in geographical and in spiritual terms.

#### 2.1 ‘LA DIVINA FORESTA SPESSA E VIVA’: WALKING INTO DANTE’S EARTHLY PARADISE

At the end of *Purgatorio* XXVII, Virgil has crowned and mitered Dante, declaring his own mission of guiding the pilgrim ‘con ingegno e con arte’ through the first two realms of the afterworld to be concluded. Dante is now responsible for himself and allowed to walk ahead of his ‘maestro’, following his own desires and will, which has finally become ‘libero, dritto e sano’.<sup>1</sup> When he steps into the garden of Eden at the beginning of *Purgatorio* XXVIII, ‘vago già di cercar dentro e dintorno / la divina foresta spessa e viva’ (lines 1-2), we know that a part of his journey is concluded, and a new section of the poem is about to begin. In his *lectura* of the canto, Guido di Pino talks about ‘un tempo nuovo della cantica’, in which ‘la materia [...] muta e s’innalza’.<sup>2</sup> On the same note, in one of the most interesting metapoetic readings of cantos XXVII-XXIX of *Purgatorio*, Olga Sedakova noticed that, before falling asleep on the threshold of the Earthly Paradise, Dante sees the stars (‘ma, per quel poco, veda io le stelle’, *Purgatorio* XXVII, 89). The scholar points out that every section of the poem ends with a reference to the stars and maintains that this line could well imply the end of Dante’s purgatorial journey and the beginning of a new intermediary experience.<sup>3</sup>

The change of tone and atmosphere that marks these last cantos of *Purgatorio* was also detected by the early commentators on the *Commedia*. Benvenuto da Imola, for example, divides the second cantica into three parts. In commenting on *Purgatorio* IX, 70-72, when Dante the pilgrim is about to cross the door of Purgatory and Dante the author tells his reader ‘vedi ben com’io innalzo / la mia matera’, Benvenuto justifies this increase of poetic effort, making a distinction between ‘antepurgatorium’, namely the section of Purgatory that has just ended, and proper

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<sup>1</sup> *Purgatorio* XXVII, 127-42. In analysing the first canto of Eden, scholars such as Guido di Pino and Tobia Toscano noticed that, in the episode of the Earthly Paradise, Dante is alone. His two companions, Statius and especially Virgil, seem to step aside in silence. See Guido di Pino, ‘Il canto XXVIII del *Purgatorio*’, *Lecture classensi*, 2 (1969), 219-41 (pp. 225-26); Tobia R. Toscano, ‘Il canto XXVIII del *Purgatorio*’, in Tobia R. Toscano, *La tragedia degli ipocriti e altre letture dantesche* (Naples: Liguori, 1988), pp. 107-29 (pp. 108-09, p. 114).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Il canto XXVIII’, pp. 222-23. For some further reflections on *Purgatorio* XXVIII as the beginning of a new section of the poem, see also Toscano, ‘Il canto XXVIII’, p. 107, and Robert Hollander, ‘Qualche appunto sull’Eden dantesco. Una *lectura* di *Purgatorio* XXVIII e XXIX’, in *Letteratura e filologia tra Svizzera e Italia. Studi in onore di Guglielmo Gorni*, ed. by Maria Antonietta Terzoli, Alberto Asor Rosa and Giorgio Inglese, 3 vols (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2010), I, 239-56 (239-40).

<sup>3</sup> See Sedakova, ‘Il Paradiso terrestre’, pp. 276-77. For an overall analysis of canto XXVIII, see also the *lecturae* of Antonio Enzo Quaglio, ‘Canto XXVIII’, in *Lectura Dantis Scaligera*, ed. by Mario Marazzan, 3 vols (Florence: Le Monnier, 1967-68), II. *Purgatorio* (1968), 1038-66 and of Marco Ariani, ‘Canto XXVIII. L’iniziazione alla sapienza edenica’, in *Lectura Dantis Romana*, II. *Purgatorio. Canti XVIII-XXXIII* (2014), 829-66.

‘purgatorium’, which is about to begin. He also refers to a non-specified ‘postpurgatorium’, which ‘erit materia difficillima respectu purgatorii’ and will constitute a further poetic challenge for the author.<sup>4</sup> This third and last section of the cantica can be identified with the part of the mountain that lies beyond the wall of fire, and with what happens in the wood of the Earthly Paradise after the pilgrim has gone through all the seven terraces of Purgatory. The sacred forest itself, as scholars have noted, sets up an interesting connection with the starting point of Dante’s journey in the ‘selva oscura’ of *Inferno* I, thus suggesting the idea of a new beginning.<sup>5</sup> The first part of Dante’s experience in the afterworld ends on the threshold of Eden and everything that he has seen and done so far has prepared him for what is going to happen in the ancient forest of the Earthly Paradise.

The last six cantos of the second cantica are indeed a very cohesive unit, an intermediate dimension between Purgatory and Paradise, between earth and heaven. They mark a pivotal moment in Dante’s journey towards God, both from the pilgrim’s and the author’s point of view. Here, while Virgil silently disappears, Dante is finally reunited with Beatrice, here he becomes spectator to the allegorical enactment of the history of the Church, and here he is invited to bathe in the waters of Lethe and Eunoe to be definitively cleansed of his sins and become ‘puro e disposto a salire a le stelle’. The scholarly discussion on Dante’s Earthly Paradise is vast and covers many different features of this complex and crucial group of cantos. In this chapter, and in the following one, I will limit myself to referring to the aspects of the Earthly Paradise section that are helpful to contextualise and understand the references to Parnassian imagery contained in the last cantos of *Purgatorio*.<sup>6</sup>

The first thing to remember when talking about Dante’s Earthly Paradise is that the description of this place, like those of many other places in the poem, relies on different sources and constitutes a mixture of old and new elements. The studies of Arturo Graf, Edoardo Coli and Bruno Nardi, which date back to the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth

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<sup>4</sup> Benvenuto, on *Purgatorio* IX, 70-72.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Salvatore Battaglia, ‘Il mito dell’innocenza nel *Purgatorio*’, in Salvatore Battaglia, *Preliminari per Dante* (Naples: Liguori, 1966), pp. 131-64 (pp. 141-43); Zandrino, ‘La divina foresta spessa e viva’; Di Pino, ‘Il canto XXVIII’, p. 225; Bernhard König, ‘Canto XXVIII’, in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*, II. *Purgatorio* (2001), pp. 435-45 (p. 442). For a broader reflection on the metaphorical role of forests in Western literature see Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992) (especially pp. 81-87).

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the main features of the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, see also Andrea Ciotti, ‘Paradiso Terrestre’, in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, IV (1973), 289-91.

centuries, are still of pivotal importance to understand how Dante conceived and built his own garden of Eden, while the most thorough analysis of the idea and the representations of the Earthly Paradise throughout the centuries can probably be found in the more recent book by Alessandro Scafi, entirely devoted to ‘il paradiso in terra’.<sup>7</sup> Dante places his Eden at the top of the mountain of Purgatory, in the middle of the southern hemisphere, surrounded by waters. In so doing, he does not follow the translation of the Bible which put the Earthly Paradise *ad orientem*, namely in the Eastern part of the world, but the one which located it in time as *a principio*.<sup>8</sup> If we look at the medieval depictions of the Earthly Paradise, we can see that the connection between this place and a mountain was not uncommon, even if there is no mention of this detail in *Genesis*.<sup>9</sup> This association can certainly be linked to the ancient holiness of the mountain as an intermediate space between earth and heaven, but might also find an explanation in the fact that, according to the Bible, four rivers flow from the Earthly Paradise to the rest of the world, suggesting the idea of the garden of Eden as located in a high position.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, this location could justify the medieval idea that the garden of Eden had not been destroyed by the great deluge recalled in the Bible, since it remained untouched by the water.<sup>11</sup> If Dante’s depiction of the Earthly Paradise on the top of a mountain is not completely new, neither is the idea of the garden of Eden as located on an island surrounded by the sea. In general, medieval descriptions of the Earthly Paradise tended to stress its remoteness and inaccessibility. Some medieval legends about the afterworld, such as the *Purgatory of St. Patrick* or the journey recalled in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, also refer to a geographical

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<sup>7</sup> See Graf, ‘Il mito del Paradiso Terrestre’; Coli, *Il Paradiso Terrestre dantesco*; Nardi, ‘Il mito dell’Eden’; Scafi, *Il paradiso in terra*. For an analysis of the medieval representations of the Earthly Paradise, see also Patch, *The Other World*.

<sup>8</sup> On the different translations of the Bible which emphasised the geographical or the temporal meaning of the Hebrew text, see Graf, ‘Il mito del Paradiso Terrestre’, pp. 1-15. For a broader analysis of the localisation and representation of the Earthly Paradise during the Middle Ages, see again Scafi, *Il paradiso in terra*, and Patch, *The Other World*, especially the fifth chapter ‘Journeys to Paradise’ (pp. 134-74).

<sup>9</sup> The biblical description of the Earthly Paradise is in Gen. 2, 8-14.

<sup>10</sup> I will look at Dante’s choices as regards the rivers of the Earthly Paradise – which constitute one of the biggest innovations of Dante’s Eden – in the next chapter of this thesis.

<sup>11</sup> Gen. 7, 1-24. It is worth noting the similarity between this biblical episode and the classical myth of the deluge, recalled in several well-known Latin texts (see, for example, Virgil, *Georgics* I, 60-63; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 240-415; Lucan, *Pharsalia* V, 71-76). I will discuss Dante’s potential references to this myth, which also involves Parnassus, in the final section of this chapter.

proximity between the Earthly Paradise and Purgatory, revealing the existence of this connection in the medieval imagination.<sup>12</sup>

What is new in Dante's account, in terms of location, is how all these suggestions find their place in the structure of the universe represented in the *Commedia*. By choosing to position its Earthly Paradise at the top of the mountain of Purgatory in the southern hemisphere of the earth, Dante creates a world in which Jerusalem and the garden of Eden are at polar opposites. This careful organisation of the space is the reflection of a precise ideological and moral choice. As contemporary studies in geocriticism suggest, the perception and the representation of the world, in geographical and cartographic terms, is not as objective as we might think. In recent years, scholars such as Robert Tally and Bertrand Westphal, who work on the relationship between literature and the representation of geographic space, have underlined the fact that our perception of the space we live in is more often the translation of a spiritual and symbolic interpretation of the universe rather than the result of its unbiased observation.<sup>13</sup> In medieval times, both space and time appears as teleologically oriented towards God. As Giuseppe Tardiola summarises, space in the Middle Ages is 'ontological, psychological, conclusive; like time, it becomes the sphere of activity of the symbol and the liturgy'.<sup>14</sup> Dante's structure of the universe offers a perfect example of this attitude towards space. In the *Commedia*, he designs geographical and conceptual oppositions between the site of the original sin, the Earthly Paradise, and the site of human redemption, Jerusalem, with a symmetry that perfectly encapsulates the providential view of the world that pervades the poem and the Middle Ages in general. Within this symbolic edifice, the Earthly Paradise appears as one of the two poles that orientate not only the history of mankind but also

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<sup>12</sup> For the text, the analysis and the literary contextualisation of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, see *Navigatio Sancti Brendani: Alla scoperta dei segreti meravigliosi del mondo*, ed. by Giovanni Orlandi and Rossana E. Guglielmetti (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2014). For the legend of the Purgatory of St Patrick, see *Il Purgatorio di San Patrizio: Documenti letterari e testimonianze (secc. XII-XVI)*, ed. by Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, Roberto Tinti and Paolo Taviani (Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> I refer here to the main studies which constitute the basis of 'geocriticism' (already mentioned in the Introduction) such as Westphal, *Geocriticism*; Westphal, *The Plausible World*; Tally, *Spatiality*. For some very useful observations on Dante's construction of space and his almost post-modernist sensibility in mapping the universe, see Theodore J. Cachey Jr., 'Cartographic Dante', *Italica. Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Italian*, 87, 3 (2010), 325-54, and Theodore J. Cachey Jr., 'Travelling/Wandering/Mapping', in *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, ed. by Manuele Gragnolati, Elena Lombardi and Francesca Southerden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 415-30.

<sup>14</sup> Giuseppe Tardiola, *Atlante fantastico del medioevo* (Rome: Rubeis, 1990), p. 20.

the life of a single man, in a ‘geography of salvation’ carefully designed by Dante to guide his reader towards God.<sup>15</sup>

As regards the descriptive elements, Dante’s depiction of the Earthly Paradise relies, once again, on multiple and different sources. The eternal spring, the absence of violent weather events, the spontaneous vegetation, the birds singing, the breeze, and the sonorous forest are all recurring elements in medieval descriptions of the Earthly Paradise. They are even more ancient, since they lead back to the classical *topos* of the *locus amoenus* and can be found in the descriptions of many mythological places where virtuous men were believed to rest after death, such as the Fortunate Isles or the Elysian Fields.<sup>16</sup> As scholars have pointed out, in Dante’s description of the Earthly Paradise, both classical and biblical suggestions are re-worked and combined in different ways, resulting in a highly symbolic landscape with traditional as well as radically new features. In this and in the next chapter, I will focus on the descriptive elements that are in dialogue with the classical tradition in order to show how the references to Parnassian myths in the Earthly Paradise seem to grow naturally out of a literary setting borrowed from the texts of Latin *auctores*, and to pinpoint some elements of continuity between the Parnassian and Edenic landscape that might shed new light on the meaning of the Earthly Paradise section in Dante’s poem.

## 2.2 ‘DOVE E QUAL ERA / PROSERPINA’: THE APPEARANCE OF MATELDA IN CONTEXT

As soon as Dante steps into the garden of Eden, we recognise a familiar scene. Olga Sedakova suggests that, when he walks into the wood of Eden, ‘Dante sembra riconoscere in ciò che vede qualcosa a lui da tempo noto e vivo nella memoria’.<sup>17</sup> As anticipated above, the feeling of *déjà vu* the scholar refers to is related to the classical tradition of the *locus amoenus*.<sup>18</sup> It is evident that Dante’s

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<sup>15</sup> For Dante’s ‘geography of salvation’ and other interesting observations on the Earthly Paradise, see Daniela Boccassini, ‘Earthly Paradise: Dante’s Initiatory Rite of Passage’, in *Oikosophia. Dall’intelligenza del cuore all’ecofilosofia. From the Intelligence of the Heart to Ecophilosophy*, ed. by Daniela Boccassini (Milan: Mimesis, 2018), pp. 181-203.

<sup>16</sup> For a history of the *locus amoenus* in Western literature, see Curtius, *European Literature*, pp. 195-200 and Michelle Zink, *Nature et poésie au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Fayard, 2006). On Dante’s interaction with the legend of the Fortunate Isles, see Theodore J. Cachey Jr., ‘Dante e le Isole Fortunate: un locus deperditus nella geografia del poema’, in Theodore J. Cachey Jr., *Le Isole Fortunate. Appunti di storia letteraria italiana* (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 1995), pp. 17-81.

<sup>17</sup> Sedakova, ‘Il Paradiso Terrestre’, p. 284.

<sup>18</sup> On the classical representation of the *locus amoenus*, see Curtius, *European literature*, pp. 183-202, and Angelo Barlett Giamatti, *Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 94-119. See also Simone Bregni, *Locus amoenus: nuovi strumenti di analisi della ‘Commedia’* (Ravenna: Longo, 2020).

depiction of the Earthly Paradise relies on many different sources, from the biblical representation of the *paradisus voluptatis* to contemporary love poetry and romance, from Guido Cavalcanti's ballad 'In un boschetto trova' la pasturella' to Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto*.<sup>19</sup> However, it is impossible not to recognise the presence of classical Latin intertexts as well. As Peter Hawkins puts it, Dante's Eden 'grows out of pagan literary soil quite as much as it does out of Scripture'.<sup>20</sup> Dante has already found this landscape – the trees, the breeze, the colours, the clear waters – in the texts of his Latin *auctores*. Scholars have noticed potential references to Virgil's *Georgics*,<sup>21</sup> for example, and to the depiction of the Elysian Fields contained in *Aeneid* VI.<sup>22</sup> The classical subtext that is most prominent in Dante's Earthly Paradise, however, is undoubtedly Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

At lines 36-42, a 'donna soletta' suddenly appears to Dante, 'cantando e scegliendo fior da fiore'. The role, the meaning and the origin of this mysterious figure (who will be named Matelda

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<sup>19</sup> On Dante's literary models for the description of the Earthly Paradise see, among others, Peter S. Hawkins, 'Watching Matelda', in Hawkins, *Dante's Testaments*, pp. 159-179; Zandrino, 'La divina foresta spessa e viva'. For Dante's construction of the purgatorial landscape, see also Anna Pegoretti, *Dal 'lito deserto' al giardino: la costruzione del paesaggio nel 'Purgatorio' di Dante* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2007) (for the potential sources of Dante's Earthly Paradise, see pp. 124-28).

<sup>20</sup> Hawkins, 'Watching Matelda', p. 159.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, the Virgilian 'dulcis [...] aura' (*Georgics* IV, 417), which recalls Dante's 'aura dolce' at line 7, and the depiction of a river ('rivus') which 'tenuis fugiens per gramina' (*Georgics* IV, 19).

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Zandrino, 'La divina foresta spessa e viva', pp. 54-55. In the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, Virgil talks about 'locos laetos et amoena virecta / fortunatorum nemorum sedisque beatas' (lines 638-39), about a luminous place ('lumine purpureo', lines 640-41), with its own sun and stars, about a fragrant wood ('odoratum nemus', line 658) where the river Lethe slowly flows ('seclusum nemus et virgulta sonantia sylvae / Lethaeumque domos placidas qui prae-natat amnen', lines 704-05). As scholars have noted, Virgil's depiction of the Elysian Fields influenced the description of many places of Dante's afterworld, such as Limbo (*Inferno* IV, especially from line 67 onwards), the Valley of the Princes in Antepurgatory (*Purgatorio* VII, 70-81) and finally the Earthly Paradise. The same descriptive elements are re-worked by Dante in different ways in three different sections of the *Commedia*. For a study of the several *loci amoeni* described by Dante in his poem (and of their literary sources), see Simone Bregni, 'Locus amoenus'. *Nuovi strumenti di analisi della 'Commedia'* (Ravenna: Longo, 2020). An overview of the medieval reception of the classical image of the *locus amoenus* can also be found in Paola Schulze-Belli, 'From the garden of Eden to the *locus amoenus* of medieval visionaries', in *Fauna and Flora in the Middle Ages: Studies of the Medieval Environment and Its Impact on the Human Mind*, ed. by Sieglinde Hartmann (Frankfurt: Lang, 2007), pp. 209-224. On the relationship between the Earthly Paradise and ancient pagan legends recalled by classical poets see again Coli, *Il Paradiso terrestre dantesco*, pp. 164-84. On the specific relation between Dante and Virgil's Elysian Fields see Maria Maslanka-Soro, 'L'oltretomba virgiliano e dantesco a confronto: qualche osservazione sul dialogo intertestuale nel *Purgatorio*', *Romanica Cracoviensia*, 15, (2015), 288-297.

only at the end of the cantic) have fueled scholarly discussion on Dante's Earthly Paradise for centuries. Many hypotheses have been proposed as regards the historical identification of this female character. Some scholars have suggested a connection with Matilde di Canossa, some have thought about a relation with the German Benedictine nun Mechtilde of Hackeborg. Other scholars prefer to link the figure of Matelda to the biography of the author and propose a potential identification with a non-specified Florentine girl connected with Beatrice and with the imagery of the *Vita nuova*.<sup>23</sup> Great attention has also been paid to the literary models for this female character, from the pastoral lyrics to the *Roman de la Rose*, from Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus* to Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto* and Guido Cavalcanti's poetry.<sup>24</sup> As regards the allegorical meaning of Matelda, the main interpretations revolve around the idea of active life (anticipated by Dante's dream of Lia in *Purgatorio* XXVII), of innocence and prelapsarian happiness, of Nature, of pure and primordial love, of a form of wisdom that prepares for Beatrice's arrival. The multiplicity of hypotheses proposed by Dante scholars throughout the centuries, however, shows that Matelda still remains an interpretative riddle in the landscape of Dante studies, an ambiguous character whose essence is complex and, therefore, hard to define.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For some hypotheses on Matelda's identification, see Giulio Natali, 'Il Paradiso Terrestre e la sua custode', in Giulio Natali, *Fronde sparte. Saggi e discorsi (1947-1959)*, (Padova: Cedam, 1960), pp. 7-21; Ernesto G. Parodi, 'Intorno alle fonti dantesche e a Matelda', in Ernesto G. Parodi, *Poesia e storia nella 'Divina Commedia'*, ed. by Gianfranco Folena and Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo (Venice: Neri Pozza, 1965), pp. 201-32; Omerita Ranalli, 'Il Purgatorio nella tradizione medievale e nella *Commedia* di Dante. Matelda e le Matildi', *Bollettino di Italianistica*, 4 (2007), 9-31; Claudia Villa, 'Matelda/Matilde: in favore della gran contessa (*Purg.* XXVIII)', in Villa, *La protervia di Beatrice*, pp. 133-61; Stefano Carrai, 'Matelda, Proserpina e Flora', in Carrai, *Dante e l'antico*, pp. 99-117.

<sup>24</sup> On the troubadour traits of Dante's depiction of Matelda, see Charles Singleton, *La poesia della 'Divina Commedia'*, trans. by Gaetano Prampolini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1978), pp. 370-73, and Massimiliano Chiamenti, 'Corollario oitanico al canto ventottesimo del *Purgatorio*', *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 13 (1999), 207-20. For the potential influences of the *Roman de la Rose* on the figure of Matelda, see Erich Köler, 'Lea, Matelda und Oiseuse. Zu Dante, *Divina Commedia*, *Purgatorio* 27. bis 31. Gesang', in Erich Köler, *Esprit und Arkadische Freiheit. Aufsätze aus der Welt der Romania* (Monaco: Fink Verlag, 1984), pp. 270-76, and Luciano Formisano, 'Da Oiseuse a Matelda', *Le forme e la storia*, 3 (1991), 85-102. For a comparison between Matelda and the personification of Nature in the *Anticlaudianus*, see Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Poet and his World* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984), pp. 392-93. For a reflection on the potential points of contact between Matelda and Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto*, see Stefano Carrai, 'Matelda, Proserpina e Flora'. On the echoes of Guido Cavalcanti's poetry in Dante's depiction of Matelda see, for example, Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the 'Comedy'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 148-53.

<sup>25</sup> For a summary of the various interpretations of the figure of Matelda, see Fiorenzo Forti 'Matelda' in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, III (1971), 854-60, and Diana Glenn, *Dante's Reforming Mission and Women in the 'Comedy'* (Leicester: Troubador,

What is important, in the context of this research, is how this figure is presented to the reader. At lines 49-51, Dante addresses Matelda with a reference to classical – Ovidian – mythology:

Tu mi fai rimembrar dove e qual era  
Proserpina nel tempo che perdette  
la madre lei, ed ella primavera. (*Purgatorio* XXVIII, 49-51)

The appearance of Matelda activates Dante's literary memory, reminding him not only of a specific character ('qual era') but also of a specific place ('dove [...] era'). By mentioning this 'dove', Dante seems to draw a parallel between different figures and different settings, asking his readers to pay attention not only to what is happening but also to where it is happening. The episode he is referring to is borrowed from the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses*, where Ovid describes the rapture of Persephone, daughter of Ceres, perpetrated by Pluto, who fell in love with the young goddess when he saw her gathering flowers in a Sicilian wood:

Haud procul Hennaeis lacus est a moenibus altae,  
nomine Pergus, aquae; non illo plura Caystros  
carmina cygnorum labentibus edit in undis.  
Silva coronat aquas cingens latus omne suisque  
frondibus ut velo Phoebeos submovet ictus.  
Frigora dant rami, Tyrios humus umida flores:  
perpetuum ver est. Quo dum Proserpina luco  
ludit et aut violas aut candida lilia carpit,  
dumque puellari studio calathosque sinumque  
inplet et aequales certat superare legendo,  
paene simul visa est dilectaque raptaque Diti:  
usque adeo est properatus amor. (*Metamorphoses* V, 385-396)

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2008), pp. 86-97 and 201-08. For further readings and interpretative hypotheses on this female character, see also Peter Armour, 'Matelda in Eden', *Italian Studies*, 34 (1979), 2-27 and the already mentioned König, 'Canto XXVIII', pp. 440-41. A good recapitulation of Matelda's interpretations, with some further observations, can also be found in David Ruzicka, "'Scegliendo fior da fiore': Exile, Desire and the Fiorentinità of Dante's Matelda", *Le Tre Corone*, 3 (2016), 25-56.

The comparison between Matelda and Persephone is based on the act of picking flowers in an atmosphere of joy and peace ('ludit et aut violas aut candida lilia carpit', says Ovid at line 392). Similarly to Ovid's Persephone, characterised by 'tanta simplicitas puerilibus [...] annis' and by a 'virgineum' attitude, Matelda moves 'non altrimenti / che vergine che li occhi onesti avalli' (lines 56-57).<sup>26</sup> The setting of this scene (a shaded 'silva' which 'ut velo Phoebeos submovet ictus') also brings to mind Dante's 'divina foresta spessa e viva' and its 'ombra perpetua, che mai / raggiar non lascia sole ivi nè luna', and so does the presence of water (a 'lacus' in Ovid's text, a 'fiumicello' in Dante's version) and flowers ('Tyrios flores', 'violas' and 'lilia' in the *Metamorphoses*, 'freschi mai' in *Purgatorio*). Both these encounters – between Persephone and Pluto, and between Matelda and Dante – happen in the context of an eternal spring. 'Qui primavera sempre e ogne frutto', writes Dante at the end of canto XXVIII, echoing the Ovidian 'perpetuum ver est' of line 391.<sup>27</sup>

While the reference to the myth of Persephone has been amply discussed by scholars, less attention has been paid to the larger context of this Ovidian episode. First of all, in Ovid's text the rapture of Persephone is recalled by Calliope, one of the nine Muses, during their contest against the Pierides. According to the myth that Ovid reports in the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses*, the nine daughters of Pierus challenged the Muses in an artistic competition, singing about the fight between the Titans and the Olympians gods. Calliope, chosen as representative of the Muses because she is 'maxima' among them, replied with a long song about the rapture of Persephone, the fury of her mother Ceres and the eventual agreement between Ceres and Pluto, according to which the young Persephone would spend half of the year on earth and the other half in Hades. Calliope's song, dotted with numerous digressions and secondary myths, predictably granted the Muses the victory. After their defeat, the Pierids were transformed into magpies, 'querentes' and 'imitantes omnia'.

Dante has already recalled this myth at the beginning of *Purgatorio*, when he invokes the Muses (and Calliope, in particular) asking for their help in composing the second cantica:

Ma qui la morta poesì resurga,  
o sante Muse, poi che vostro sono;  
e qui Calìopè alquanto surga,

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<sup>26</sup> For a detailed comparison between Matelda and Persephone, see Stefano Carrai, 'Matelda, Proserpina e Flora'.

<sup>27</sup> At lines 28-30 Dante also seems to reuse Ovid's technique of description by negative comparison ('non illo plura Caystros / carmina cynorum labentius audit in undis', *Metamorphoses* V, 386-87). See Hawkins, 'Watching Matelda', pp. 165-66.

seguitando il mio canto con quel suono  
di cui le Piche misere sentiro  
lo colpa tal, che disperar perdono. (*Purgatorio* I, 7-12)

As anticipated in the previous chapter, this is the third of the nine invocations contained in the poem, five of which are addressed to the Muses. After *Inferno* II ('O muse, o alto ingegno or m'aiutate', line 7) and *Inferno* XXXII ('Ma quelle donne aiutino il mio verso / ch'aiutaro Anfione a chiuder Tebe', lines 10-12), Dante opens the second cantica by asking the nine sisters to once again support his poetry while he tries to represent the realm of the afterworld where 'l'umano spirito si purga'. I will analyse some of the rhetorical features of this invocation in the course of the next chapter, putting them in relation to the invocation to Urania and her 'coro' contained in *Purgatorio* XXIX. What is worth noting, on this occasion, is that Dante's reuse of the same Ovidian episode in opening both the whole cantica and the Earthly Paradise section reaffirms, once again, the idea of a new beginning that we perceive as soon as we enter the wood of Eden in *Purgatorio* XXVIII. The myth of Persephone itself is, in the end, a myth of new beginnings, which tells the story of a new spring, of a new life, a new birth. The movement might appear circular, as if the start and the end of Dante's purgatorial journey eventually coincided, but it is not.

As some scholars have already noted, Dante's mentioning of the myth of the Pierides and the Muses in *Purgatorio* I has multiple layers of meaning. First of all, the recollection of the Pierides' artistic *hybris* works as a negative model. Like many other Ovidian myths mentioned in the poem, the story of the Pierides underlines the difference between the comic destiny of the Christian poet, who humbly submits himself to the divine, offering his art as an instrument of God's will, and the tragic outcome of an excessive and presumptuous faith in human capacities on their own.<sup>28</sup> By

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<sup>28</sup> A similar use of an Ovidian myth of artistic *hybris* can be found, for example, in the opening invocation of *Paradiso*, when Dante mentions the story of Marsyas. I will talk more about Dante's re-elaboration of this specific myth in Chapter 4. For an overview of Dante's reworking of Ovidian myths, especially the ones involving human *hybris*, see some studies by Michelangelo Picone, such as 'L'Ovidio di Dante', in *Dante e la 'bella scola' della poesia*, pp. 107-144; 'Intertestualità dantesca: la riscrittura di Ovidio', *Nuova Secondaria*, 7 (1994), 22-26; 'Dante argonauta. La ricezione dei miti ovidiani nella *Commedia*', in *Ovidius redivivus. Von Ovid zu Dante*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone and Bernhard Zimmermann (Stuttgart: M. und P. Verlag, 1994), pp. 173-202. See also Peter S. Hawkins, 'Transfiguring the text: Ovid, Scripture and the Dynamics of Allusion', *Stanford Italian Review*, 5 (1985), 115-139 (repr. in Hawkins, *Dante's Testaments*, pp. 180-93); *The Poetry of Allusion; Dante and Ovid*. For an analysis of the mechanisms of reuse and correction of the Ovidian myths of *hybris*, see also the studies by Giuseppe Ledda, such as 'Semele e Narciso: miti ovidiani della

referring to the Pierides' punishment, Dante is setting the coordinates of his new cantica, putting his poetry at God's service and distancing himself from any kind of poetic arrogance. On a further level, however, we can see how the relationship that Dante establishes with Calliope and the Muses also presents some elements of disruption and invites a substantial re-thinking of the interactions between the human and the divine in the passage from a pagan to a Christian perspective. Reflecting on this first invocation of *Purgatorio*, scholars such as Pamela Royston Macfie and Jessica Levenstein have underlined how Dante is presenting himself as an anti-Pierid but also picturing the Muses in an ambiguous way.<sup>29</sup> The subtle reference to the Muses' cruelty, which leads the Pierides to 'disperar perdono', seems already in contrast with the spirit of the second cantica, where we find souls that were granted forgiveness until the very last moment of their lives. But the content of Calliope's song also reveals gods and goddesses who yield to passions and vengeance, thus showing an idea of the divine which is very far from a Christian ideal. If we look beyond this invocation, we can also see that, in the course of the *Commedia*, Dante is not afraid to correct the content of Calliope's story. In Ovid's text, the Pierid recalled an upside-down gigantomachy, where the giants somehow appeared as the winning party in front of the fleeing gods.<sup>30</sup> When Calliope starts singing, the first thing that she does is to correct this version of the myth, depicting one of the giants, Typhon, as trapped and chained under Sicily, causing earthquakes when he tries to move.<sup>31</sup> Calliope's picture is in turn corrected by Dante himself when, in *Paradiso* VIII, Charles Martel states that Sicily ('la bella Trinacria'), 'caliga [...] non per Tifeo ma per nascente solfo' (lines 67-70). Dante scholars have underlined how all these details suggest a re-thinking of Calliope's (and the Muses') authority in Dante's poem. If Dante is keen to present the Pierides as a negative model of artistic *hybris*, he also makes clear that the artistic inspiration which is at the core of classical texts needs to be recontextualised in a new Christian framework. The mention of this mythological nucleus in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, at the beginning of the Earthly Paradise section, can be considered as part of this process of recontextualisation. The mention of Persephone, which for the medieval

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visione nella *Commedia* di Dante', in *Le 'Metamorfosi' di Ovidio nella letteratura tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. by Gian Mario Anselmi and Marta Guerra (Bologna: Gedit, 2006), pp. 17-40; 'Invocazioni e preghiere', pp. 133-36.

<sup>29</sup> See Pamela R. Macfie, 'Mimicry and Metamorphosis: Ovidian Voices in *Purgatorio* 1.7-12', in *Dante and Ovid*, pp. 87-98; Jessica Levenstein, 'Resurrecting Ovid's Pierides: Dante's invocation to Calliope in *Purgatorio* 1.7-12', *Dante Studies*, 126 (2008), 1-19.

<sup>30</sup> *Metamorphoses* V, 318-31.

<sup>31</sup> *Metamorphoses* V, 346-58. These earthquakes are the reason why Pluto left the Hades to see what was happening and found Persephone in the wood.

reader was also an allusion to Calliope and to the entire Ovidian episode, not only creates a sense of continuity with the beginning of the cantic but also brings forward a reflection on poetry that Dante had already begun in *Purgatorio* I. The steps of this poetic evolution are signaled by references to Parnassian myths that point to one another from different sections of the cantic. That sense of new beginning that we perceive when we start reading *Purgatorio* XXVIII, highlighted by the reference to a myth of re-birth, also involves Dante's poetry. As a new Calliope (or a new Ovid), Dante is now singing a new Persephone and a new spring. Furthermore, as I will show in the next section of this chapter, he seems to do that in the wood of a new Parnassus.

### 2.3 'VIRGINEUMQUE HELICONA': HELICON, PARNASSUS AND THE EARTHLY PARADISE

If we now look at Ovid's text from an even wider perspective, we notice that this episode itself (the contest between the unnamed Pierid and Calliope) is reported by another Muse to the goddess Minerva, who had come to Mount Helicon to see the spring Hyppocrene, recently generated by a kick from the winged horse Pegasus: 'Tritonia [...] Thebas / virgineumque Helicon petiit; quo monte potita / constitit et doctas sic est adfata sorores' (*Metamorphoses* V, 250-55). The entire narration, therefore, takes place on the mountain of the Muses, just as Dante's encounter with Matelda/Persephone happens on the top of the mountain of Purgatory. If we look at the Ovidian description of Mount Helicon, when Minerva looks around to enjoy the beauty of that place, we find other interesting similarities with Dante's Earthly Paradise that have so far received little attention among Dante scholars:

Quae mirata diu factas pedis ictibus undas  
silvarum lucos circumspicit antiquarum,  
antraque et innumeris distinctas floribus herbas  
felicesque vocat pariter studioque locoque  
Mnemonidas. (*Metamorphoses* V, 264-268)

Minerva is described by Ovid in the act of admiring the waters pouring from Hyppocrene, one of Helicon's springs, just as Dante lingers over the 'rio' which prevents him from walking further in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, 25-33. The woods of Mount Helicon are described by Ovid as 'silvarum lucos antiquarum', a word choice that Dante seems to remember when he writes about his Edenic 'selva antica'. The 'innumeris distinctas floribus herbas' mentioned by Ovid also convey the same

multicoloured idea of the ‘gran variazion di freschi mai’ mentioned by Dante at line 36. The Ovidian Helicon and Dante’s garden of Eden are described in similar ways.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the images of Helicon and Parnassus seem to merge during the Middle Ages, and a deeper analysis of the modalities and the consequences of this convergence will be conducted in the next chapter. At this point, however, it is worth noting that this Ovidian representation of the mountain of poetry might have been well impressed into Dante’s literary memory. The whole episode of the encounter between Minerva and the Muses, and the myths that this episode contains, re-emerges at several points in Dante’s work, even outside the passages of the *Commedia* mentioned above. In the opening of the widely discussed *Epistle to Cangrande*, for example, we read, ‘Verum ne diuturnum me nimis incertitudo suspenderet, velut Austri regina Ierusalem petiit, velut Pallas petiit Elicon, Veronam petiit fidis oculis discursurus audita, ibique magnalia vestra vidi, vidi beneficia simul et tetigi’.<sup>32</sup> The mention of Minerva is a clear reference to the Ovidian account of the myth, as shown by the insistence on the act of seeing (‘vidi’) in the *Epistle to Cangrande*, which also characterises Minerva’s presence on Mount Helicon in the *Metamorphoses*,<sup>33</sup> and by the use of the verb *petere* in both texts. ‘Thebas / virgineumque Helicon petiit’, says Ovid in *Metamorphoses* V, 253-54; ‘Veronam petiit’ claims the author of the *Epistle*.<sup>34</sup> Even if we do not want to take the *Epistle to Cangrande* into account for the well-known problems concerning its attribution,<sup>35</sup> it is nevertheless worth mentioning that the same episode is recalled

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<sup>32</sup> *Epistles* XIII, 3. For an accurate analysis of the beginning of *Epistle* XIII and its implications, see Claudia Villa’s commentary on *Epistle* XIII in Dante Alighieri, *Opere*, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 2011-2014), II. *Convivio, Monarchia, Epistole, Egloghe*, ed. by Gianfranco Fioravanti, Claudio Giunta, Diego Quaglioni, Claudia Villa and Gabriella Albanese (2014), pp. 1565-83. See also Luca Azzetta’s commentary on the *Epistle* in *Nuova Edizione Commentata delle Opere di Dante*, 8 vols (Rome: Salerno, 2015-2021) V (2016), pp. 273-97; 329.

<sup>33</sup> “Volui mirabile factum / cernere; vidi ipsum materno sanguine nasci”. Excipit Uranie: “Quaecumque est causa videndi / has tibi, diva, domos, animo gratissima nostro es. / [...] / Quae mirata diu [...]” (*Metamorphoses* V, 258-64).

<sup>34</sup> Further reflections on the role of Minerva as a goddess related to Parnassus and the Muses will be provided in Chapter 3, where I will discuss Beatrice’s appearance in *Purgatorio* XXX, covered with a veil ‘cerchiato de le fronde di Minerva’.

<sup>35</sup> On the authenticity of the *Epistle to Cangrande* scholars do not agree. For a brief exposition of the reasons supporting Dante’s authorship, see Saverio Bellomo, ‘L’*Epistola a Cangrande*, dantesca per intero: ‘a rischio di procurarci un dispiacere’, *L’Alighieri. Rassegna dantesca*, 56 (2015) 5-19. For some contributions against the authenticity of the *Epistle* see Alberto Casadei, ‘Sull’autenticità dell’*Epistola a Cangrande*’, in *Ortodossia ed eterodossia in Dante. Atti del convegno di Madrid, 5-7 novembre 2012*, ed. by Carlota Cattermole, Celia de Aldama and Chiara Giordano (Madrid, Ediciones de la Discreta, 2014), pp. 803-830; Giorgio Inglese, ‘*Epistola a Cangrande*: questione aperta’, *Critica del testo*, 2, 3 (1999) 951-974.

by Dante in the fourth *Eclogue*, where the author states his (and his interlocutor's) love for the Muses with a reference to Pyreneum, the Thracian king who tried to capture the Muses and force himself on them but died in the attempt: 'Mopsus amore pari mecum connexus ob illas / que male gliscentem timide fugere Pyreneum' (*Egloghe* IV, 65-66). The story Dante is recalling is once again narrated by the Muses to Minerva, while they are conversing right after the goddess' arrival on Mount Helicon, in the same fifth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (lines 273-93).

It is therefore clear that the entire episode, and the whole dialogue between Minerva and the Muses that takes place on the mountain of poetry, constituted a fundamental part of Dante's literary imagination. In this context, we can assume that among the many *loci amoeni* that influenced the depiction of the Earthly Paradise in the *Commedia*, the classical (in this case Ovidian) representation of Parnassus/Helicon must have played a significant role in Dante's creative process. If we look at the texts of classical Latin authors, we cannot find many detailed descriptions of Parnassus. As mentioned in the Introduction, the mountain was generally represented as incredibly high and steep,<sup>36</sup> and covered in woods.<sup>37</sup> The depiction offered by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* is probably one of the most detailed pictures of the mountain of poetry drawn by a classical author and presents some interesting intersections with Dante's Earthly Paradise.<sup>38</sup>

Similar intersections can also be found if we look at another late-antique text that was fundamental for the medieval reception and recontextualisation of classical mythology, namely Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*. In this allegorical and didactic prosimetrum, likely written in the fifth century, Capella describes the wedding between Philology and Mercury, attended by many deities. After describing the event (and its antecedents) in the first two books of the treatise, Capella goes on dedicating one book to each of the liberal arts, represented as seven maids that Lady Philology receives as a wedding gift.<sup>39</sup> Each of the women, introduced by Apollo, talks about the art she represents in front of Philology and the other gods. The whole work

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<sup>36</sup> See Virgil, *Georgics* III, 291-94: 'sed me Parnasi deserta per ardua dulcis / raptat amor; iuvat ire iugis, qua nulla priorum Castaliam molli devertitur orbita clivo'. Elsewhere in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid talks about a 'mons [...] verticibus arduus astra duobus, nomine Parnassus, superant que cacuminal nubes' (*Metamorphoses* I, 316-17).

<sup>37</sup> In the first book of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes the top of Parnassus as 'umbrosa' (*Metamorphoses* I, 467).

<sup>38</sup> Other interesting similarities between Parnassus and Dante's Earthly Paradise can be detected if we look at another extensive description of the mountain of poetry, which can be found in the fifth book of Lucan's *Pharsalia* (lines 71-140). This specific passage will be analysed in the final section of this chapter, as well as in Chapter 4.

<sup>39</sup> Books three to seven are devoted to Grammar, Dialectic, Rhetoric, Geometry, Arithmetic, Astronomy and Harmony, respectively. Capella says that Medicine and Architecture were also present at the wedding but they were not allowed to speak.

therefore became a compendium of late-antique knowledge and had a wide circulation during the Middle Ages as a manual of the liberal arts that had a significant role in medieval education.<sup>40</sup>

Although there is no certainty about Dante's direct interactions with the text of the *De nuptiis*, there is evidence of the circulation of Capella's book during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, especially in schools.<sup>41</sup> Books one and two, in particular, started circulating independently from the rest of the book and were widely known for their re-elaboration of classical mythological figures in symbolic and allegorical terms.<sup>42</sup> It is in the first book of the *De nuptiis* that Martianus Capella offers an interesting description of Parnassus, which includes some elements that appear new if compared to the previous literary representations of the mountain of poetry. This peculiar description is introduced in a context in which Mercury and Virtue are looking for Apollo, and eventually find him on Parnassus:

Tandem Fam nuntiante cognoscunt quod Phoebus gaudet Parnasia rupes. Licet inde quoque ad Indici montis secretum obumbratumque scopulum nube perpetua posterius migrasse perhibebant, tamen Cirrhaeos tunc recessus et sacrati specus loquacia antra conveniunt. Illic autem circumstabat in ordinem quicquid imminet saeculorum, Fortunae urbium nationumque, omnium regum ac totius populi [...].

Inter haec mira spectacula Fortunarumque cursus motusque nemorum etiam susurrantibus flabris canora modulatio melico quodam crepitabat impulsu. [...] Ita fiebat, ut nemus illud harmoniam totam superumque carmen modulationum congruentia personaret. Quod quidem exponente Cyllenio Virtus edidit etiam in caelo orbes parili ratione aut concentus edere aut succentibus covenire. Nec mirum quod Apollinis silva ita rata modificatione congrueret, cum caeli quoque orbes idem Delius moduletur in Sole [...].

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<sup>40</sup> The survey of the surviving manuscripts of the *De nuptiis* conducted by Claudio Leonardi, for example, showed the wide circulation of the text during the Carolingian Renaissance. See Claudio Leonardi, 'I codici di Marziano Capella', *Aerum*, 33, 5/6 (1959), 443-89. On the circulation of the *De nuptiis*, see also Cora E. Lutz, 'Martianus Capella', in *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum Medieval and Renaissance Latin Translation and Commentaries: Annotated Lists and Guides*, ed. by Paul O. Kristeller and Ferdinand E. Cranz, 9 vols (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1960), II (1960), 367-70.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, the observations of Thomas Persico in 'Il concetto agostiniano di "modulatio" nel *De Vulgari Eloquentia*', in *Sulle tracce del Dante minore. Prospettive di ricerca per lo studio delle fonti dantesche*, ed. by Thomas Persico and Riccardo Viel (Bergamo: Sestante, 2017), pp. 83-110 (p. 87).

<sup>42</sup> See Leonardi, 'I codici di Marziano Capella', pp. 473-74.

Demonstrabat praeterea Virtuti Cyllenius amnes quosdam caelitus defluentes, quos transeundos esse perhibebat, ut ad deum ipsum, quem reperire cura est, pervenirent.  
(*De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* I, 11)

Capella is here describing the part of Parnassus inhabited by Apollo, namely Cirrha, the ‘recessus Cirrhaeos’.<sup>43</sup> Referring to the prophetic talent of the god, Capella adds that, inside these ‘loquacia antra’, we can find the Fortunes of the world (‘Fortunae urbium nationumque, omnium regum ac totius populi’). He also states that, between these great visions, we can hear some sort of music (‘nemorum etiam susurrantibus flabris canora modulatio melico quodam crepitabat appulsu’). The wind blows between the trees and makes them sound in different ways, resulting in a perfect harmony (‘Ita fiebat, ut nemus illud harmoniam totam superumque carmen modulationum congruential personaret’). Mercury then explains that the celestial spheres produce the exact same harmony, and this is not surprising since the magical wood is sacred to Apollo, who regulates the movements of the spheres as well. The idea of a musical forest connected to Apollo is rather new. Although the description of the woods was a typical component of the classical *ekphrasis*,<sup>44</sup> this image of a sacred forest that echoes the harmony of the spheres seems to have no parallels or antecedents in classical literature.<sup>45</sup>

In her analysis of the passage, Danuta Shanzer links the presence of this peculiar wood on Capella’s Parnassus with the *topos* of the *nekyia*, namely the necromantic ritual through which humans would contact the gods or the dead to ask them about the future.<sup>46</sup> It is sufficient to look at the texts of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Statius’ *Thebaid* to find the same intersection between woods, necromancy and prophecies.<sup>47</sup> More specifically, states Shanzer, the representation of a sacred forest is often the prelude to a descent into the afterworld:

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<sup>43</sup> I will talk more extensively about the different parts of Parnassus, including Cirrha, in Chapter 4.

<sup>44</sup> See Curtius, *European Literature*, pp. 194-95.

<sup>45</sup> See Danuta Shanzer, *A Philological and Literary Commentary on Martianus Capella’s ‘De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii’*. Book 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 85-90. For an analysis of Martianus Capella’s description of Parnassus, see also the relative commentary in *Martiani Capellae De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii. Libri I-II*, ed. by Lucio Cristante (Hildesheim: Weidmannsche, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Shanzer, *A Philological and Literary Commentary*, p. 85.

<sup>47</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* VI, 13 and 259; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XI, 583; Statius, *Thebaid* X, 84-117.

At this particular point in the myth of Book I there has been a split between the human and the divine worlds: the soul has fallen, the world has grown corrupt, the oracles are silenced, and Apollo has ceased to communicate with the human race. In Martianus' gnostic-influenced theology the impetus for the salvation of the lower soul comes from its divine counterpart, and unlike the normal epic scene where anxious mortal consults an oracle, here Mercury seeks Apollo. A description of a sacred grove, rendered de rigueur by the precedent of the *Aeneid*, is standard epic baggage necessary for a *katabasis*, but in this case precedes an *anabasis* (*epanodos*) which paradoxically is a *nekyia*, though not in the traditional sense. [...] Thus this Apolline grove is an exact counterpart of the one in which Aeneas wanders prior to his descent to the underworld.<sup>48</sup>

In Martianus Capella's book, after Mercury and Virtue have found Apollo, they all ascend to Heaven to join the other gods and start preparing Mercury's wedding with Philology. The wood of Parnassus therefore becomes the starting point of this ascensional movement, the point of contact between an earthly and a heavenly dimension, where the trees resonate together with the universe, producing the exact same melody.

Interestingly, similar observations to the ones made by Shanzer about Capella's 'Apolline grove' can be made on Dante's woods as well. It is in the 'selva oscura' of *Inferno* I that Dante starts his *katabasis* and it is in the 'divina foresta spessa e viva' of *Purgatorio* XXVIII that he becomes worthy of his *anabasis*. However, it is worth noting that, while there are no references to music or sound in the description of the dark forest of *Inferno* I, the Edenic 'selva antica' at the end of *Purgatorio* is extremely musical, not only for the chirping of birds (typical of every *locus amoenus*) but also for the sound that the wind makes between the trees. As soon as he steps into the garden of Eden, Dante detects the presence of a constant and gentle breeze, an 'aura dolce, senza mutamento', which touches his face like 'soave vento' (*Purgatorio* XXVIII, 7-9). The same wind makes the branches of the trees move around him ('le fronde, tremolando, pronte / tutte quante piegavano a la parte', lines 10-11). Dante also claims that the sound produced by the wind between the trees accompanies the songs of the birds, thus creating a sort of polyphony: 'gli augelletti [...] / cantando, ricevieno intra le foglie, / che tenevan bordone a le sue rime' (lines 14-18). It is interesting to notice that the word 'bordone' used here is a technical term that identifies a low and continuous note,

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<sup>48</sup> Shanzer, *A Philological and Literary Commentary*, p. 86.

often used in liturgical songs at Dante's time, in order to sustain the main musical theme.<sup>49</sup> Later on in the canto, when Dante asks Matelda the reason for the presence of the wind in the Earthly Paradise, a place supposedly untouched by atmospheric phenomena, he talks about the sound of the forest ('l suon de la foresta', line 85). Matelda replies that it is the movement of the spheres that makes the grove sound ('ne l'aere vivo, tal moto percuote, / e fa sonar la selva perch'è folta', lines 107-08). The 'music' of Dante's Edenic forest is therefore closely connected with the movements of the spheres. In her commentary on this canto, Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi defines this idea as a 'straordinaria fantasia'.<sup>50</sup> None of the commentaries on the *Commedia* signals a connection between Dante's Earthly Paradise and the descriptions of the garden of Eden that circulated during the Middle Ages as regards the element of the wind and the sound it produces.

The idea of the wind blowing between the trees can be considered, once again, as one of the elements that characterise the classical depiction of the *locus amoenus*. As mentioned above, many Dante commentators have rightfully linked Dante's sounding Eden to the Elysian Fields of the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, where Virgil claims, 'Interea videt Aenas in valle reducta / seclsum nemus et virgulta sonantia silvae' (lines 703-04). In Dante's Earthly Paradise, however, the sound of the forest cannot be considered as simply part of a rhetorical *topos*. The background 'music' that the pilgrim hears on the top of the mountain of Purgatory is produced by the movements of the spheres and reflects the cosmic harmony.<sup>51</sup> It is not an unimportant detail. Dante's Earthly Paradise represents an intermediate dimension, a place where Earth and Heaven meet – almost touch – each other, and Dante scholars have noted this specific trait of the Dantean Eden.

As Luigi Pietrobono pointed out, commenting on *Purgatorio* XXVIII 103-08, 'si comincia fin di lassù a godere come un primo saggio dell'armonia delle sfere'.<sup>52</sup> Marco Ariani, in his *lectura* of the canto, underlines the fact that 'Matelda spalanca per la prima volta l'arcano della connessione tra il mondo terreno, rappresentato nella sua quintessenza seminale dall'Eden, e il "moto" (v. 107) cosmico dei cieli'.<sup>53</sup> The gentle breeze that makes the Edenic trees sound is the materialisation of this concept, the physical sign of the interaction between the earthly and the heavenly dimension

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<sup>49</sup> See Raffaello Monterosso, 'bordone', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, I (1970), 683-84.

<sup>50</sup> Chiavacci Leonardi, on *Purgatorio* XXVIII, 106-08.

<sup>51</sup> The same words used by Matelda in *Purgatorio* XXVIII ('fa sonar la selva', line 108), are used by Dante the author in *Paradiso* XXIII, when he describes the movements and the songs of the blessed around Mary: 'Così la circolata melodia / si sigillava, e tutti gli altri lumi / facean sonare il nome di Maria' (lines 109-11).

<sup>52</sup> Pietrobono, on *Purgatorio* XXVIII 103-08.

<sup>53</sup> Ariani, 'Canto XXVIII', p. 855.

that takes place in the Earthly Paradise. This specific trait of Dante's Eden has a potential literary antecedent only in the 'canora modulatio' that resounds on Martianus Capella's Parnassus, echoing the music of the celestial spheres. In Dante's description of the Earthly Paradise there are no specific lexical choices that suggest a direct quotation of Capella's text. Nonetheless, Capella's idea of Parnassus as a liminal place, where wondrous, prophetic visions happen, where a sacred forest grows and where the wind produces a music that is connected with the celestial spheres, would probably sound very familiar to the early readers of the *Commedia*.

Bearing in mind this passage of the *De nuptiis* might add some new elements to the reading of Dante's Earthly Paradise and might challenge us to look at it not only in the light of the Virgilian Elysian Fields or, more generically, of the classical *locus amoenus*. I suggest that classical representations of Parnassus also played a role in Dante's conception of the garden of Eden. There are some similarities, more or less evident, between these two places that seem to hint at conceptual overlap. As I seek to show in the course of this thesis, the depictions of the mountain of poetry by Ovid and Martianus Capella are only two of the many references to Parnassian imagery that seem to re-emerge, at different levels, in Dante's Earthly Paradise. The classical Parnassus and the Christian Eden might perform a similar function, in Dante's mind. When Matelda emerges from the 'selva antica', she appears as a new Persephone sung by a new Ovid, but she might also be a new Muse who welcomes the poet on a new Parnassus. Perhaps not by chance, this female figure finishes her speech in *Purgatorio* XXVIII with an observation about classical poetry that involves Parnassus and tells us something fundamental for the understanding of the relationship between pagan literature and Christian faith.

## 2.4 DREAMING ON MOUNT PARNASSUS

At line 76 Matelda starts talking and offers a long explanation of the main features of the garden of Eden that continues until the end of the canto. She begins by revealing the true nature of the wood in which Dante and the other two poets are walking: 'Voi siete nuovi [...] / in questo luogo eletto a l'umana natura per suo nido' (lines 76-78). A few lines later, she adds that God 'questo loco / diede per arr'a lui d'eterna pace' (lines 92-93). We are in the place of primordial and prelapsarian

happiness, where man ‘per sua difalta [...] dimorò poco’.<sup>54</sup> In order to further help Dante to understand what he is seeing and feeling in the forest of the Earthly Paradise, she adds: ‘ma luce rende il salmo *Delectasti*, / che puote disnebbiar vostro intelletto’ (lines 80-81). The biblical text Matelda is referring to is psalm 91. As scholars have noted, she does not mention the *incipit*, which was the usual way of quoting the psalms, but the beginning of line 5, thus focusing on the component of joy derived from God’s creation: ‘Quia delectasti me, Domine, in factura tua; et in operibus manuum tuarum exultabo’. As Peter Hawkins points out, with the reference to this biblical text, Matelda is offering Dante an interpretative key. She is telling him how to read her joy, her loving attitude and the beauty of the wood he has just walked in.<sup>55</sup>

A few lines later, she promises that she will clear the mist that blurs Dante’s knowledge (‘e purgherò la nebbia che ti fiede’, line 90), presenting herself as the figure who will guide Dante in understanding the essence of the Earthly Paradise. And in fact, after this statement, she answers Dante’s questions about the presence of wind and rivers in the garden of Eden, which seems to contradict what Statius said in *Purgatorio* XXI (lines 40-57) about the absence of atmospheric phenomena on the mountain of Purgatory (‘L’acqua [...] e ’l suon de la foresta / impugnan dentro a me novella fede’, lines 85-86). The breeze is generated by the movement of the Primum Mobile, while the origin of the water in the Earthly Paradise is not the rain, as happens on earth, but God’s will (‘esce di fontana salda e certa’, line 124). This prodigious water forms two different rivers, the Lethe on one side, which flows in front of Dante, separating him from Matelda and with the power to erase the memory of sins, and the Eunoe on the other side, which restores the memory of good actions: ‘Da questa parte con virtù discende / che toglie altrui memoria del peccato; / da l’altra d’ogne ben fatto la rende’ (lines 127-29).

I will talk more extensively about Dante’s representation of these two rivers, about their novelty and their potential interactions with Parnassian imagery in the next chapter of this thesis. For now, I want to underline the fact that Matelda’s words bring back to light that metaphorical relationship between knowledge, water and thirst that runs through the whole poem and that I discussed in the previous chapter. The reference to God as ‘fontana salda e certa’ at line 124 already pointed the reader towards this kind of imagery. Talking about *Purgatorio* XXII, I showed the centrality of this metaphor during the encounter between Statius, Virgil and Dante, where the motif

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<sup>54</sup> In *Paradiso* XXVI, Adam himself identifies this short amount of time as a little more than six hours: “Nel monte che si leva più da l’onda / fu’ io [...] / da la prim’ora a quella che seconda, / come ’l sol quadra, l’ora sesta” (lines 139-42).

<sup>55</sup> See Hawkins, ‘Watching Matelda’, 194-98.

of sapiential thirst was intertwined with the first appearance of Parnassus and its springs, creating an unexpected lexical connection between Christian knowledge and poetic inspiration. It is noteworthy that here, in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, Dante's intellectual curiosity is once again represented as thirst that needs to be quenched and once again intertwined with Parnassian references. After revealing the nature of the two Edenic rivers to Dante, Matelda adds:

E avvegna ch'assai possa esser sazia  
la sete tua perch'io più non ti scuopra,  
darotti un corollario ancor per grazia. (*Purgatorio* XXVIII, 134-36)

The word 'corollario', from the Latin 'corolla' (crown) originally designated a prize for the winner, something that was given beyond necessity.<sup>56</sup> From Boethius onwards, the term started to be used in mathematical and philosophical contexts to identify the consequence of a logical demonstration.<sup>57</sup> What Matelda is about to tell Dante is at the same time a gift and the necessary consequence of her theological explanations, something that was already implicit in the truth that she just revealed. This mysterious woman, who promised Dante that she would answer his questions and offered him the key to understand and interpret the Earthly Paradise, now explains why the Edenic landscape looked so familiar – and so classical – to the Christian poet:

Quelli ch'anticamente poetaro  
l'età de l'oro e suo stato felice,  
forse in Parnaso esto loco sognaro. (*Purgatorio* XXVIII, 139-41)

Dante establishes a direct relationship between the dreams of the ancient poets on Mount Parnassus and the garden of Eden. The scholarship on this renowned tercet is extensive and every reading of *Purgatorio* XXVIII has taken these verses into account and identified them as a key passage for the understanding of Dante's relationship with classical literature. The majority of these analyses, however, are focused on the first part of this comparison, on that sense of a prelapsarian happiness which brings together the Christian idea of the Earthly Paradise and the classical myth of the Golden Age as described, for example, in Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* or at the beginning of Ovid's

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<sup>56</sup> See Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum libri* XIX, XXX.

<sup>57</sup> See Alfonso Maierù, 'corollario', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, II (1970), 212.

*Metamorphoses*.<sup>58</sup> Ancient poets probably saw a glimpse of the garden of Eden in their dreams, says Matelda, sensing the truth but not being able to fully understand it.

What is also worthy of note, however, is that these potentially prophetic dreams, which constitute a point of contact between classical poetry and Christian truth, happened on Mount Parnassus. The detail that has often been neglected by Dante scholars is that, with this tercet, Dante also establishes a direct relationship between the garden of Eden and the classical mountain of poetry. As we have seen over the course of this chapter, this connection is carefully prepared by Dante throughout the whole canto, which is dotted not only with classical references in general but also with themes and motifs that seem to pertain to Parnassian imagery. When Matelda reveals her ‘corollario’ to Dante, it is presented as the culmination of a series of references and suggestions that have been accumulating since Dante started walking in the wood of Eden and are now, at last, explained. Just as she told the pilgrim to think about the atmosphere of joy that characterises the Earthly Paradise in the light of psalm 91, Matelda is now offering him the key to read certain aspects of the garden of Eden, revealing that the similarities between this place and other literary landscapes that were familiar to Dante and his readers have a precise and significant meaning.

In order to understand the origin and the implications of these Parnassian dreams in Dante’s Earthly Paradise, we need to start from the literary tradition that lies behind line 141. The image of the poet sleeping on Parnassus and receiving inspiration by means of a dream, as a sort of poetic investiture, was quite common in classical literature. The *topos* dates back to Hesiod’s *Theogony* where, in the proem, the poet claims that the Muses appeared to him in a sort of hallucination – a dream, we might say – encouraging him to sing.<sup>59</sup> During the Hellenistic period, the same image of the poet as seer was famously reworked by Callimachus, who, in one of the introductory fragments of his *Aetia*, recalls how he was transported while sleeping on Mount Helicon. Here the Muses talked to him, answering his questions and revealing to him the origin and the reasons behind the ancient myths.<sup>60</sup> At the dawn of Latin literature, the idea of the poet receiving his investiture in a dream can be found, for example, in Ennius’ *Annales*. In the prologue

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<sup>58</sup> Virgil, *Eclogues* IV, 18-30; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 89-112. For an analysis of this comparison between the garden of Eden and the Golden Age see, for example, d’Arco Silvio Avalle, ‘L’età dell’oro nella *Commedia* di Dante’, *Lettere classensi*, 4 (1973), 125-43; Roberto Mercuri, ‘Il mito dell’età dell’oro nella *Commedia* di Dante’, *Le forme e la storia*, 3 (1991), 9-34; Stefano Carrai, ‘Matelda, Proserpina e Flora’.

<sup>59</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony* I, 22-34.

<sup>60</sup> Callimachus, *Aetia* I, fr. 2-2j.

to the first book, the poet states that he was ‘somno leni placidoque revinctus’ when Homer (not the Muses) appeared to him, validating his poetic project.<sup>61</sup>

However, the potential classical intertext that Dante commentators have signaled since the early stages of Dante’s reception is a passage from Persius’ *choliambi*, where the poet originally reworks the *topos* of the poetic investiture and claims that he did not dream on Mount Parnassus or drink from its springs, thus setting the lower and less serious tone of his poetry:<sup>62</sup>

Nec fonte labra prolui caballino,  
nec in bicipiti somniasse Parnaso  
memini, ut repente sic poeta prodirem;  
Heliconidasque pallidamque Pirenen  
illis remitto quorum imagines lambunt  
hederae sequaces; ipse semipaganus  
ad sacra vaturn carmen adfero nostrum.  
Quis expedit psittaco suum ‘chaere’  
picamque docuit nostra verba conari?  
Magister artis ingenique largitor  
venter, negatas artifex sequi voces.  
Quod si dolosi spes refulserit nummi,  
corvos poetas et poetridas picas  
cantare credas Pegaseum nectar. (*Satirae*, prol. 1-14)<sup>63</sup>

The similarity between the second line of Persius’ *choliambi* and *Purgatorio* XXVIII, 141, is remarkable. Some scholars have been skeptical about Dante’s direct knowledge of Persius. The Latin poet, renowned for his satirical poems and active during the first century AC, is only mentioned once in Dante’s *corpus* and precisely in *Purgatorio* XXII, during the conversation between

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<sup>61</sup> Ennius, *Annales* I, 1-3.

<sup>62</sup> In the fourteenth century, Benvenuto da Imola seems the first to recognise the connection (‘in Parnaso, idest, Parnaso monte, ubi poetae dicebantur somniare, ut dicit Persius’), followed by Francesco da Buti and then later commentators from the sixteenth century onwards. See Benvenuto, on *Purgatorio* XXVIII, 139-44; Francesco da Buti, on *Purgatorio* XXVIII 138-48.

<sup>63</sup> *Juvenal and Persius*, ed. and trans. by Susanna Morton Braund (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

Virgil and Statius that I discussed in the previous chapter. Answering Statius' question about the fate of other Latin poets in the afterworld, Virgil states:

‘Costoro e Persio e io e altri assai  
[...] siam con quel Greco  
che le Muse lattar più ch'altri mai,  
nel primo cinghio del carcere cieco;  
spesse fiato ragioniam del monte  
che sempre ha le nutrice nostre seco’. (*Purgatorio* XXII, 100-05)

This single mention of Persius, compared, for example, to the multiple references to Juvenal (the other satirical poet who is remembered earlier in *Purgatorio* XXII and in other passages from the *Convivio* and the *Monarchia* as well),<sup>64</sup> led some scholars to believe that Dante knew Persius mainly as a name and that he did not have a direct knowledge of his texts.<sup>65</sup>

Persius' poetry, however, had quite a huge circulation during the Middle Ages.<sup>66</sup> The verses mentioned above, in particular, mainly appeared in the medieval manuscript tradition at the beginning of the *Satirae*, forming a sort of prologue that, together with the first satire, probably constituted the most widely read part of Persius' *oeuvre*.<sup>67</sup> As Ernst Robert Curtius pointed out, Persius' refusal of the canonical Parnassian inspiration in the first lines of his *cholimabi* ('Nec fonte labra prolui caballino / nec in bicipiti somniasse Parnaso') was well known among the first Christian poets.<sup>68</sup> In his study of Western European literature, Curtius showed how, in the transition from pagan to Christian texts, the role of classical deities, especially those connected to poetic inspiration, went through different stages. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the first

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<sup>64</sup> For Dante's references to Juvenal, see *Purgatorio* XXII, 14; *Convivio* IV, 12; *Convivio* IV, 29; *Monarchia* II, 3.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Sapegno's commentary on *Purgatorio* XXII, 100.

<sup>66</sup> For Persius' reception in Dante's time and for Dante's potential knowledge of the *Satires*, see Robert Black, 'Classical Antiquity', in *Dante in Context*, edited by Zygmunt Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 297-318 (pp. 312-13); Klaus Fetkenheuer, *Die Rezeption der Persius-'Satiren' in der lateinischen Literatur. Untersuchungen zu ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte von Lucan bis Boccaccio* (Bern: Lang, 2001).

<sup>67</sup> For Persius' circulation in the Middle Ages, see Paola Scarcia Piacentini, *Saggio di un censimento dei manoscritti contenenti il testo di Persio e gli scolii e i commenti al testo* (Rome: Fratelli Palombi Editori, 1973); Holt N. Parker, 'Manuscript of Juvenal and Persius', in *A Companion to Persius and Juvenal*, ed. by Susanna Braund and Josiah Osgood (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 137-161).

<sup>68</sup> Curtius, *European literature*. See, in particular, the chapter on the Muses (pp. 228-46).

Christian authors tended to firmly refuse the classical sources of inspiration, like the Muses, Apollo and, in general, anything connected with the idea of Parnassus, in order re-affirm their faith, emancipate their texts from the classical *auctoritas* and legitimise their work as inspired by God alone. It is therefore clear that, in this context, Persius' *choliambi* might have been interpreted as a sort of literary antecedent. Persius' statement was aimed at expressing the comic, and in a sense lower, nature of his satirical poems, as opposed to a higher and more serious poetry, officially legitimated by the Muses on Parnassus. However, the fact that Persius did not drink from Parnassus' spring ('Nec fonte labra proluui caballino') or dream on Mount Parnassus ('nec in bicipiti somniasse Parnaso') was taken by the early Christian poets as a sort of model for their rejection of the classical sources of inspiration.<sup>69</sup> As already stated in the previous chapter, by the time Dante was writing, this general sentiment of distrust toward Parnassian inspiration and classical mythology had been largely overcome. However, the reuse of Persius' images in early Christian poetry proves that the text of the *Satires* or at least the *choliambi* that introduced them, had a notable circulation during the Middle Ages.

Moreover, a careful analysis of the text of the *Commedia* reveals a number of passages that might indicate Dante's direct knowledge of the *Satires*. Ettore Paratore, for example, has shown the echoes of *Satires* I, 1 ('O curas hominum! o quantum est in rebus inane!') in several verses of Dante's poem, such as the beginning of *Paradiso* XI ('O insensate cura de' mortali'), but also, potentially, *Purgatorio* XXII, 41 ('l'appetito de' mortali') and *Purgatorio* XXVII, 116 ('cura de' mortali').<sup>70</sup> A similar reference to the frivolous entanglements of men can also be detected in *Satires* II, 61-63,<sup>71</sup> where Paratore notices the expression 'scelerata pulpa' (line 63), which recalls Dante's 'si spolpa' of *Purgatorio* XXIV, 80, and the image of the 'curvae in terris animae' (line 61), for which the scholar

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<sup>69</sup> For example, in the seventh century, Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherborne and author of the *Aenigmata*, re-works the image of Parnassus and the idea of the poet dreaming on the mountain to distance them from classical poetry: 'Castalidas nimphas non clamo cantibus istuc / [...] / Cynthi sic nunquam perlustru cacumina, se nec / in Parnasso procubui, nec somnia vidi. / Nam mihi versificum poterit Deus addere carmen'. (*Aenigmata*, *prol.* 10-16). Persius' use of the word 'semipaganus' (which expresses an idea of closeness with the countryside and distance from the intellectual circles of the city) was also interpreted by Christian authors as the declaration of a poet who felt only half pagan.

<sup>70</sup> For these expressions, Paratore also points to the likely influence of Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae* (I, III, 14, and also III II 2), a text that Dante certainly knew. See Ettore Paratore, 'Persio', in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, IV (1973), 434-35, and Ettore Paratore, 'Echi di Persio nella *Divina Commedia*', in Ettore Paratore, *Biografia e poetica di Persio* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1968), pp. 203-23 (pp. 214-16).

<sup>71</sup> 'O curvae in terris anime et caelestium inanis, / quid iuvat hoc, templis nostros inmittere mores / et bona dis ex hac scelerata ducere pulpa?' (vv. 61-63).

suggests a visual connection with the punishment for avarice itself.<sup>72</sup> Other relationships have been detected between Persius' *Satires* and the *Commedia*, such as the possible influence of *Satires* I, 27 ('scire tuum nihil est nisi te scire hoc sciat alter?') on Dante's *Inferno* XIII, 25 ('cred'io ch'ei credette ch'io credesse'). However, Persius' most resonant verses within Dante's poem are certainly those from the prologue cited above, which deal with the image of Parnassus and with matters of poetry. Paratore not only recognises a precise echo of this prologue in Matelda's 'corollario' but considers the influence of Persius' *choliambi* on every passage of the *Commedia* in which Dante mentions the act of drinking from the springs of Parnassus, namely *Purgatorio* XXII, 65 ('verso Parnaso a ber ne le sue grotte') and *Purgatorio* XXXI, 140-41 ('chi palido si fece sotto l'ombra / sì di Parnaso, o bevve in sua cisterna').<sup>73</sup> I will talk more extensively about the *topos* of Parnassian waters in the next chapter of this thesis. For now, I note that the reference to Persius in *Purgatorio* XXVIII does not appear to be isolated. Persius' verses seem particularly prolific in Dante's imagination and I believe they constitute, together with the episode from the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses* analysed above and with a passage from Lucan's *Pharsalia* that will be examined in the Chapter 4,<sup>74</sup> one of the main points of reference in the shaping of Parnassian imagery in the *Commedia*.

Dante's reuse of the ancient motif of the poet-seer and the way he reworks and recontextualises it in the framework of the Earthly Paradise is worthy of attention. In Matelda's words, the poets' dreams on Mount Parnassus are not simply the symbol of a privileged poetic inspiration, as happens in Persius' *Satires*, but hold a precise prophetic value, foreseeing a reality that can only be explained in Christian terms. As discussed in the previous chapter, the (potentially) prophetic content of classical texts was at the core of the conversation between Statius and Virgil in *Purgatorio* XXII, where the image of Parnassus appears for the first time (and more than once) in the poem. Now, in the final section of *Purgatorio*, this second reference to the mountain of poetry at line 141 seems to elicit the same metapoetic reflection. Once again, we learn that classical texts, if read within the right interpretative coordinates, can lead towards Christian truths. In the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, it is Matelda who sets these coordinates for Dante and for the reader of

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<sup>72</sup> Paratore, 'Echi di Persio', pp. 216-17.

<sup>73</sup> According to Paratore traces of Persius' prologue can also be found in *Paradiso* XXV, 1-9 (where Dante seems to make lexical choices that recall Persius' verses) and in the invocation to Apollo of *Paradiso* I, 16-18. See Paratore, 'Echi di Persio', pp. 218-20.

<sup>74</sup> To these potential intertexts we should add Virgil, *Aeneid* VII, 641 ('Pandite nuc Heliconae, deae, cantusque movete', mentioned in Chapter 1) and the passage from Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis* analysed in the previous section of this chapter (*De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* I, 11).

the poem, at the end of a speech aimed at revealing the secrets of the garden of Eden. This woman, who is half biblical figure and half classical goddess, guides the pilgrim beyond the *littera* of classical texts, revealing that intersection between prophecy, poetry and interpretation that is fundamental in understanding the dialogue between the *Commedia* and classical literature.

In analysing *Purgatorio* XXVIII and the following cantos, some scholars have detected the presence of an intense metapoetic discourse. Olga Sedakova, among others, insisted on the ‘natura profetica dell’ispirazione poetica’ that emerges in this section of the poem. She claims that, after canto XX, Dante’s purgatorial journey also becomes a metapoetic conversation between Dante and other poets that culminates in the garden of Eden, where the close connection between poetry and prophecy is finally revealed in all its potential implications.<sup>75</sup> These acute analyses, however, do not take into account the fact that the reflection on poetry and prophecy throughout the *Commedia*, and the second cantica in particular, is signaled and mediated by the presence of Parnassian imagery. The contact between classical texts and Christian truths, which takes the form of an unconscious prophetism that needs to be interpreted with the right tools, happens on Mount Parnassus and is sanctioned on the top of another mountain that, as we have seen in this chapter, shares some common traits with Parnassus.

In commenting on the reference to the classical mountain of poetry in *Purgatorio* XXII, 100-05, when Virgil explains to Statius that he resides in Limbo with other poets and often talks with them about the ‘monte / che sempre ha le nutrice nostre seco’, Giorgio Barberi Squarotti detected a connection between Parnassus and the mountain of Purgatory. The scholar claims that,

Il monte Parnaso si contrappone, allora, come il luogo della conversazione dei grandi poeti dell’antichità, esclusi, tuttavia, dalla salvezza, al monte Purgatorio, del quale non si è mai poetato né mai i poeti hanno potuto sognarlo nei loro versi, ma che è lo spazio, ora, dell’ascesa comune di Virgilio e di Stazio e di Dante, di tre altri poeti, ma immersi nell’atmosfera della purificazione dal peccato e dell’ascesa verso il cielo [...]. I due monti sono, appunto, implicitamente contrapposti: nel limbo i grandi poeti dell’antichità parlano del Parnaso dove sono le Muse, ma è il discorso di chi non ha

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<sup>75</sup> Sedakova, ‘Il Paradiso terrestre’, pp. 290-91. Another reading of the cantos of Eden that insists on the metapoetic component of this section is that of Claudia Villa in ‘Corona, mitria, alloro e cappello: per *Par.* XXV’, in *La protervia di Beatrice*, pp. 183-200. Here, the scholar focuses on *Purgatorio* XXX, on the connection between Beatrice and Minerva, and that between Minerva, knowledge and poetry. I will talk more extensively about *Purgatorio* XXX and the presence of Minerva in Chapter 3.

altro orizzonte escatologico, mentre qui c'è davanti l'ascesa alla cima del Purgatorio, che per Dante sarà il luogo dove sarà purificato e fatto degno di salire alle stelle, mentre per Stazio sarà il punto da cui si innalzerà verso il cielo dopo aver concluso il tempo della purgazione. Non le Muse sono sulla cima del monte del Purgatorio, ma il paradiso terrestre e Beatrice: cioè, sono le figure dell'escatologia, quelle che non possono che essere estranee all'esperienza dei grandi poeti del limbo.<sup>76</sup>

Barberi Squarotti is here making a comparison between the poets who resides in Limbo and are connected to the classical mountain of poetry, and the Christian poets (Stadius and Dante) who are climbing the mountain of Purgatory in order to reach the Earthly Paradise and finally become worthy of ascending to Heaven. The scholar recognises a direct link between Parnassus and Purgatory, establishing a strong opposition between the garden of Eden and Parnassus, between Matelda and the Muses, between salvation and damnation. Ancient poets could not dream about Purgatory on Mount Parnassus, claims Barberi Squarotti. However, in *Purgatorio* XXVIII Dante says exactly the opposite. I would instead argue that these two places are not conceived as opposites in Dante's mind. The Earthly Paradise is not an anti-Parnassus but a new Parnassus, the new destination of a new poetic journey. Matelda tells us that one place contains and retrospectively explains the other. The key for this explanation is in the relationship between prophecy and poetry that Dante started delineating in *Purgatorio* XXII.

## 2.5 THEMIS AND CLASSICAL PROPHECIES

Matelda's statement in *Purgatorio* XXVIII gives us the interpretative key to read the presence of Parnassian imagery in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise. As I will discuss, there are other important references to the mountain of poetry and to Parnassian deities in the last cantos of *Purgatorio*, which will be examined in the next chapter. Before moving to the analysis of those passages, however, I would like to offer one last observation on the reflection on poetry and prophecy that seems to be mediated and encouraged by the presence of Parnassus in the *Commedia*. There is another potential reference to Parnassian imagery at the end of the Earthly Paradise section which involves prophetism and has never been connected to the classical mountain of poetry so far. I believe that examining this reference in the light of the complex and coherent system of Parnassian images

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<sup>76</sup> Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, 'Stazio', pp. 300-01.

distributed in the poem could offer a new perspective on a passage of the poem that, as scholars have noted, is already extremely rich in meaning and decisive for Dante's self-fashioning as a poet.

The passage that I am referring to is in *Purgatorio* XXXIII, at the very end of Dante's purgatorial journey. Here, many themes developed in the section of the Earthly Paradise reach their apex. Here Beatrice comments on the allegorical representation that took place in the previous cantos. Here Dante eventually dives into the waters of Eunoe and becomes worthy of ascending to Paradise. However, this is also the canto of prophetism. On the one hand, here Dante receives his second prophetic investiture, when Beatrice takes up what she said in *Purgatorio* XXXII, 103-105<sup>77</sup> and compels Dante to 'notare', 'segnare' and 'scrivere' what he saw in the garden of Eden during the sacred procession (lines 50-57).<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, Beatrice herself prophesies that a non-specified person ('un cinquecento diece e cinque, messo di Dio', lines 43-44), connected with the metaphoric eagle (the Empire, lines 37-38), will come and kill the prostitute and the giant that are now usurping the chariot of the Church.<sup>79</sup> At this point, Beatrice recognises the obscurity of her prophecy but also states that history itself will soon make her words clear:

E forse che la mia narrazion buia,  
qual Temi e Sfinge, men ti persuade,  
perch'a lor modo lo 'ntelletto attua;  
ma tosto fier li fatti la Naiade  
che solveranno questo enigma forte  
sanza danno di pecore o di biade. (*Purgatorio* XXXIII, 46-51)

In order to talk about the obscurity of her words, Beatrice refers to the Sphinx and to Themis. These two figures were both associated with oracles and ambiguity and both of them appear in

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<sup>77</sup> "Però, in pro del mondo che mal vive, / al carro tieni or li occhi, e quel che vedi, / ritornato di là, fa che tu scrivi" (*Purgatorio* XXXII, 103-05).

<sup>78</sup> "Tu nota; e sì come da me son porte, / così queste parole segna a' vivi / del viver ch'è un correre a la morte. / E aggi a mente, quando tu le scrivi, / di non celar qual hai vista la pianta / ch'è or due volte dirupata quivi" (*Purgatorio* XXXIII, 50-57).

<sup>79</sup> See *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 37-45: "Non sarà tutto tempo sanza resa / l'aguglia che lasciò le penne al carro, / per che divenne mostro e poscia preda; / ch'io veggio chiaramente, e però il narro, / a darne tempo già stelle propinque, / secure d'ogn'intoppo e d'ogne sbarro, / nel quale un cinquecento diece e cinque, / messo di Dio, anciderà la fuia / con quel gigante che con lei delinque".

medieval mythographers and encyclopedias, as well as in commentaries to classical texts. The story of the Sphynx is well known and mentioned, for example, in the seventh book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (lines 759-65) and in the first book of Statius' *Thebaid* (lines 66-67). Her famous riddle, with which she haunted Thebans and which was eventually solved by Oedipus, causing the Sphynx's death, was reported with details by the second *Vatican Mythographer*: 'Inde procedens uenit ad montem ubi erat Sphynx monstrum omnibus pretereuntibus hoc enigma proponens, quid primo iiii deinde iii deinde ii deinde iii deinde iiii graditur pedibus, ea conditione ut qui solueret, ipsi pennas incideret, qui non, capite truncaretur, quod Oedipus soluens monstrum occidit'.<sup>80</sup>

Themis too, however, originally identified as the goddess of Justice, was known during the Middle Ages as a prophetess connected with oracles. Servius, for example, in his widespread commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*, describes her as 'antiquissima dearum vates'.<sup>81</sup> The goddesses' prophetic talent is underlined both in the first *Vatican Mythographer*, which refers to the 'Themide oraculo',<sup>82</sup> and in *Papias Vocabulista*, where Themis is allegorically interpreted as 'obscuritas vel caligo'. In terms of general meaning, this passage of the *Commedia* is therefore quite clear. The comparison between Beatrice, on the one hand, and the Sphynx and Themis on the other, is aimed at showing the obscurity of prophetic language but underlines, at the same time, the different outcome of Christian prophecies, which, unlike pagan ones, will soon find their natural explanation without provoking any damage to men ('sanza danno di pecore o di biade').

However, some elements of these verses have troubled Dante's interpreters for a long time. In particular, the reference to the Naiads (nymphs of the rivers) at line 49 has long puzzled Dante's commentators, since there is no trace of the ability of these nymphs to solve riddles in classical mythology. It was Fausto Ghisalberti who shed light on this problem in an article from 1932, pointing to an error in the manuscript tradition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>83</sup> According to Ghisalberti, Dante's verses mainly rely on *Metamorphoses* VII, 759-65, where Ovid summarises the epilogue of the story of the Sphynx:

Carmina Laiades non intellecta priorum  
soluerat ingeniis, et praecipitata iacebat

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<sup>80</sup> *Mythographus Vaticanus* II, 230,

<sup>81</sup> Servius, on *Aeneid* IV, 246. See also his commentary on *Aeneid* III, 104.

<sup>82</sup> *Mythographus Vaticanus* I, 189. See also *Mythographus Vaticanus* II, 73.

<sup>83</sup> See Fausto Ghisalberti, 'L'enigma delle Naiadi', *Studi Danteschi*, 16 (1932), 105-125.

inmemor ambagum vates obscura suarum  
 [scilicet alma Themis, nec talia linquit inulta]  
 protinus Aoniis inmittitur altera Thebis  
 pestis et exitio multi pecorumque suoque  
 rurigenae pavere feram. (*Metamorphoses* VII, 759-65)

Here Ovid tells how, after Oedipus ('Laiades', the son of Laius) solved the Sphynx's riddle, Thebes was cursed with a new beast, which massacred the herds and brought great damage to the Thebans (the 'danno di pecore o di biade' Dante refers to at line 51). However, Ghisalberti shows how it is almost certain that the text available at Dante's time substituted 'Naiades' for 'Laiades' at line 759, thus provoking many mistakes and many efforts among commentators to explain the presence of the water nymphs (the Naiads) in this passage. Ghisalberti proved that this version of the text was quite popular at Dante's time, since it left traces not only in the *Commedia* but in many medieval commentaries on the *Metamorphoses* as well. In all probability, Dante's early commentators also relied on the same corrupted text, since none of them signals Dante's mistake in this specific passage.

The confusion of medieval interpreters, however, also applies to the identification of the 'vates' mentioned at line 761. In Ovid's text, this word clearly refers to the Sphynx, defeated by Oedipus. However, after analysing the medieval commentary tradition and glosses on the *Metamorphoses*, Ghisalberti showed how many medieval interpreters identified this 'vates' as Themis. Furthermore, at some point, in order to make the passage clearer, a spurious verse was added to Ovid's text to better explain this identification of the 'vates': 'scilicet alma Themis, nec talia linquit inulta' (line 762). From this point on, a new version of the myth, basically invented by medieval commentators, started circulating, picturing Themis as the vindictive goddess who sent the horrible beast to Thebes because she was jealous of the Naiads' ability to solve riddles. It is not clear whether Dante was aware of this medieval version of the myth or not, and it is not clear whether, mentioning the Sphynx and Themis together, he implicitly acknowledged the existence of a double interpretation for Ovid's 'vates'. However, Ghisalberti's argument are convincing and it is clear that, at least as far as the Naiads (and the 'danno di pecore o biade') are concerned, Dante relied on the corrupted version of the seventh book of *Metamorphoses*.

However, I would like to point out the fact that the figure of Themis also had another kind of mythological background of which Dante was most likely aware. This background is once again

connected with Parnassian imagery. In *Metamorphoses* I, 313-415,<sup>84</sup> Ovid recalls the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha, one of the main myths associated with Parnassus in classical culture. According to the legend, Jupiter ordered a great flood which covered the entire world with water. The god's intention was to destroy the human race, which had become degenerate and corrupted during the Bronze Age. During the deluge, the only piece of land above the water was Mount Parnassus, which was said to be the highest mountain on earth. This first part of the myth is reported not only by Ovid, who defines Parnassus as a mountain which 'verticibus petit arduus astra duobus' (line 316), but also by Lucan, who depicts Parnassus as rising from the waters in the fifth book of his *Pharsalia*: 'Hoc solum fluctu terras mergente cacumen / eminebat pontoque fuit discriminem et astris. / Tu quoque vix summam, seductus ab aequore, rupem / extuleras' (lines 75-78). Interestingly, in Dante's *Commedia* (in *Paradiso* XXVI), Adam describes the garden of Eden, at the top of the mountain of Purgatory, in very similar terms: 'Nel monte che si leva più da l'onda, / fu'io, con vita pura e disonesta' (lines 139-42). As already mentioned, one of the ideas about the Earthly Paradise during the Middle Ages was that this place of primordial happiness survived the deluge ordered by God because it was located on a very high mountain. In the map of the connections between Edenic and Parnassian elements that I aim to reconstruct with this thesis, this detail seems to point again in the direction of a comparison between these two places, which – in different ways – played a substantial role in the pagan and Christian imagination.

Ovid's account of the myth continues and explains how Deucalion was warned about the deluge by his father (the Titan Prometheus) and built a boat to escape the flood with his wife, Pyrrha. During the deluge, the couple were spared by the gods because of their righteousness and eventually found shelter on Mount Parnassus. Once they realised they were the only two survivors, Deucalion and Pyrrha decided to consult Themis, the goddess of order and justice who was said to live on Parnassus (and to give oracles) even before Apollo.<sup>85</sup> It is not by chance that when Deucalion and Pyrrha land on Mount Parnassus, they express their gratitude to the nymphs of the mountain and to Themis:

Mons ibi verticibus petit arduus astra duobus,  
nomine Parnasos, superantque cacumina nubes.

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<sup>84</sup> See also *Fasti*, IV, 791-94.

<sup>85</sup> This version of the legend is reported by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* I. According to another version of the myth, Deucalion and Pyrrha are advised directly by Jupiter (see Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 153).

Hic ubi Deucalion (nam cetera texerat aequor)  
 cum consorte tori parva rate vectus adhaesit,  
 Corycidas nymphas et numina montis adorant  
 fatidicamque Themis, quae tunc oracla tenebat. (*Metamorphoses* I, 316-21)

Ovid here describes Themis as 'fatidica' (namely prophetic) and adds 'quae tunc oracla tenebat' (further on, in the fourth book of the *Metamorphoses*, he will describe her again as 'Parnasia', namely 'goddess of Parnassus')<sup>86</sup>. When Deucalion and Pyrrha ask for Themis' help, the goddess replies in an ambiguous way, inviting the couple to throw 'the bones of the mother' behind them:

Interea repetunt caecis obscura latebris  
 verba datae sortis secum inter seque volutant.  
 Inde Promethides placidis Epimethida dictis  
 mulcet et 'aut fallax' ait 'est sollertia nobis,  
 aut (pia sunt nullumque nefas oracula suadent!)  
 magna parens terra est: lapides in corpore terrae  
 ossa reor dici; iacere hos post terga iubemur.' (*Metamorphoses* I, 388-94)

Ovid describes her words as 'obscura verba', conveying the same idea of a 'narration buia' mentioned by Dante in *Purgatorio* XXXIII. Further on at line 392, when he states that oracles cannot persuade men into doing something evil, Ovid uses the verb 'suadere', which might find an echo in 'men ti persuade' in *Purgatorio*. XXXIII. The myth eventually has a positive ending. Deucalion understood the 'mother' to be the earth and the 'bones' to be the stones and, together with his wife, started tossing stones behind his back. From these rocks new men and women were generated and a new breed of men re-populated the earth.

This myth of renovation appears to be well established in the classical tradition. We can find references to this episode in texts by Virgil (*Georgics* I, 60-63), Juvenal (*Satirae* I, 81-87) and Lucan (*Pharsalia* V, 71-78). In this last passage, where Lucan amply recalls the myth of the deluge and offers a detailed description of Parnassus, Themis is once again described as the goddess who used to live on the mountain before Apollo: 'ultor ibi expulsae [...] / matris adhuc rudibus Paean

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<sup>86</sup> *Metamorphoses* IV, 643: 'Themis hanc dederat Parnasia sortem'.

Pythona sagittis / explicuit, cum regna Themis tripodas que teneret'.<sup>87</sup> The myth was clearly well known during the Middle Ages as well, and can be found in the texts of late antique and medieval mythographers and encyclopedias, as well as in commentaries to classical texts. The episode is reported by Isidore of Seville at the end of the thirteenth book of his *Etymologiarum libri*, for example, and also by the first and second *Vatican Mythographers*.<sup>88</sup>

In these last cases, the legend of Deucalion and Pyrrha is reported as an ancient myth, without any allegorical interpretations, but there are cases in which medieval commentators read this myth from different angles. In Arnulf of Orleans' commentary on the *Metamorphoses*, for example, we find a juxtaposition between this classical myth and the biblical account of the great flood. Arnulf explicitly claims that there is no need for allegorical interpretation since the legend can be interpreted in a purely historical way: 'Terra in mare mutata est per diluvium. Hoc non indiget integumento, quia re vera hoc fuit in tempore Noe'.<sup>89</sup> The other main medieval commentator of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, John of Garland, reports an allegorical interpretation according to which Deucalion and Pyrrha should be read as the main natural elements from which things generate: 'Est aqua Deucalion est ignis Pirra'.<sup>90</sup> In Giovanni Bonsignori's *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare*, composed in the late fourteenth century, we find a long allegorical explanation of many aspects of this myth. Bonsignori claims that, with this story, Ovid wants to demonstrate how even after the destruction of human race knowledge (represented by Parnassus) survived: 'Ovidio nel presente trattato vuole dimostrare come Dio consume per lo deluvio il mondo e come, per ciò che avvenisse, la scienza non morì mai, la quale è data da li poeti per abitazione del monte de Parnaso, dove per lo deluvio se repusarono Deucalion e Pirra'.<sup>91</sup> Bonsignori adds that Deucalion and Pyrrha were two cities which remained intact during the flood and were the first ones to be re-populated by survivors after the deluge. Since people came to these cities from the peak of Parnassus, where they had found shelter during the flood, the mountain

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<sup>87</sup> There were also versions of the myth according to which Deucalion and Pyrrha eventually landed on different mountains. Hyginus, for example, mentions the Sicilian Etna in *Fabulae*, 153. At the end of the fourth century, Servius reports another version of the myth according to which Deucalion and his wife found shelter on Mount Atho. However, he proves himself aware of other sources that identify Parnassus as the mountain where Deucalion and Pyrrha landed, and he does not contradict this version of the legend (see Servius, on *Eclogues* VI,41).

<sup>88</sup> See Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum libri* XIII, 22, 4-5; *Mythographus Vaticanus* I, 189; II, 73.

<sup>89</sup> Arnulf of Orleans, *Allegoriae super Ovidii Metamorphosen*, I, 6. The same parallel between Deucalion and Noah can also be found in later commentaries on the *Metamorphoses*, such as the French *Ovide moralisé* (I, 2140-2158).

<sup>90</sup> *Integumenta Ovidii*, I, 87-90.

<sup>91</sup> Giovanni Bonsignori, *Ovidio Metamorphoseos Vulgare* F, 1-12.

started to be considered as the source of all knowledge and its waters were believed to inspire poetry and philosophy because they were the first fresh waters that men were able to drink after the deluge. The myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha is extensively recalled by Giovanni Boccaccio as well, who, in his *Genealogiae deorum gentilium*, reports different versions of the legend both in its original form and in later rationalising interpretations.<sup>92</sup>

Even after this brief summary, we can conclude that the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha was widely known and interpreted during the Middle Ages. It is true that the figure of Themis, in the medieval accounts of the myth mentioned above, remains in the background, but nonetheless we cannot ignore the popularity of this myth and of all its elements in Dante's time. The fourteenth-century commentators on the *Commedia* proved their familiarity with this episode as well. Even if Dante never explicitly mentions the episode in his poem, his early commentators refer to this Ovidian myth when commenting on the presence of Themis in *Purgatorio* XXXIII or when the image of Parnassus emerges in other parts of the poem.<sup>93</sup>

We can therefore assume that when he refers to Themis and her prophetic talent in *Purgatorio* XXXIII, Dante had in mind not only the passage from the seventh book of the *Metamorphoses* mentioned above (which clearly remains the main source for Dante's verses) but also this episode from *Metamorphoses* I, in which Themis is depicted as an ancient prophetess who lived on Mount Parnassus even before Apollo's time.

A parallel between the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha and Dante's *Purgatorio* XXXIII has already been proposed by some scholars. For example, in his analysis of the canto Andrea Battistini suggests a similarity between Deucalion and Dante, who are both responsible for a renovation of mankind:

Dinanzi all'«enigma forte» proposto da Beatrice, Dante potrebbe essere equiparato per un verso a Deucalione e per un altro verso a Edipo. Al pari dell'uno, ha ricevuto la missione provvidenziale, enunciata nell'epistola a Cangrande, di «removeere viventes in

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<sup>92</sup> See *Genealogiae Deorum Gentilium*, IV, 47.

<sup>93</sup> See, for example, Benvenuto da Imola's commentary on *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 46-51: «Themis fuit olim sacerdotissa, quae dabat responsa in monte Parnaso valde obscura: unde post illud diluvium particulare quod fuit olim in Graecia respondit Deucalioni regi et Pyrrhae eius uxori consulentibus de reparatione hominum perditorum ex aqua, quod jactarent ossa parentis post terga sua». In explaining the presence of Themis in *Purgatorio* XXXIII, references to the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha can also be found in the *Ottimo Commento* and in the commentary of Francesco da Buti.

hac vita de statu miserie et perducere ad statum felicitatis' (*Ep.* XIII, 15), facendoli rinascere dopo la morte spirituale prodotta dal peccato.<sup>94</sup>

These readings, however, have always neglected the role of Themis in this myth and, when taking her figure into account, they have always focused on her generic relationship with pagan prophetism. From this perspective, these verses of *Purgatorio* XXXIII have been rightly put in relation with other passages of the poem in which Dante deals with the theme of pagan prophetism; these include *Inferno* XX and the punishments of the seers, *Paradiso* XVII, where Cacciaguida's clear words are put in contrast with the 'ambage' of 'la gente folle' (lines 31-36), and *Paradiso* XXXIII, with the reference to the Sibylline oracles (lines 64-66).<sup>95</sup>

However, I believe that the role of Themis as a Parnassian deity, at this point of the second cantica, might have a significant meaning and should not be neglected. There is no doubt that Dante had *Metamorphoses* VII in mind when he wrote about Themis and the Sphynx, and there is no doubt that this passage constitutes part of the reflection on the limits of pagan prophetism that Dante develops throughout the *Commedia*. However, reading these verses also in the light of the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha might add something to the interpretation of the figure of Themis at this crucial juncture of the poem. If Dante was aware of the connection between this ancient goddess and Parnassus (and the circulation of the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha shows that he might have been), the mention of Themis might imply not only a reference to pagan prophetism in general but to Parnassian prophetism, which in the *Commedia* always implies – as we observed in *Purgatorio* XXII and XXVIII – some sort of reflection about the role of poetry. Battistini's observations on the parallel between Dante and Deucalion might be expanded. In this equation, not only would Dante perform a role that is similar to Deucalion's, but he would receive this task from a new prophetess of Parnassus, which is now Beatrice in the garden of Eden. In this canto, at the end of a section that started with a parallel between the Earthly Paradise and the classical mountain of poetry, Dante receives a poetic investiture. 'Così queste parole segna a' vivi', says Beatrice at line 53. Unlike the dreams of classical poets on Mount Parnassus, however, the content of Dante's poetry does not need to be interpreted in the right way in order to be salvific. The truth

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<sup>94</sup> See Andrea Battistini, 'Tra memoria e amnesia. Lettura di *Purg.* XXXII', *L'Alighieri*, 48 (2007), 93-106 (p. 99).

<sup>95</sup> On Dante's relationship with pagan prophetism (often presented in ambiguous terms) as a negative term of comparison, see especially Giuseppe Ledda, 'Dante e il profetismo degli antichi pagani', in *Poesia e profezia nell'opera di Dante. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi. Ravenna, 11 novembre 2017*, ed. by Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Centro Dantesco dei Frati Minori Conventuali, 2019), pp. 179-230.

of Dante's words is already evident, the unconscious prophetism of pagan texts has now become explicit. Dante cannot talk 'com'om che sogna' (*Purgatorio* XXXIII, 33) anymore. The reference to Themis at the end of the Earthly Paradise might therefore be considered as part of that system of Parnassian references which, from *Purgatorio* XXII until the end of the cantica, accompanies the readers in the process of understanding Dante's poetic (and prophetic) project, and its relationship with classical texts.

From this perspective, the mountain of Purgatory and Mount Parnassus should not be conceived as opposed to each other. On the contrary, they might perform a similar function, bringing together, at different levels and with different implications, poetry and prophecy. Even from a geographical point of view the two places might be conceptually related. In the previous pages, I referred to the passage from the fifth book of the *Pharsalia* where Lucan describes Parnassus as the only piece of land emerging from the water after the deluge, noting a potential similarity with the description of the mountain of Purgatory made by Adam in *Paradiso* XXVI. In that same passage, Lucan also describes Parnassus as a mountain which is as far from the East as it is from the West: 'Hesperio tantum quantum summotus Eoo / cardine Parnasos gemino petit aethera colle' (lines 77-78). Lucan is here referring to the fact that, in classical antiquity, the centre of the world – the so-called *omphalos* – was thought to be in Delphi, namely the city sacred to Apollo which was located at the foot of Mount Parnassus. According to the myth, to determine the centre of the world, Jupiter released two eagles from the extremities of the horizon and the two birds met exactly upon Delphi, which means upon Mount Parnassus. In one of his aforementioned studies on geocriticism, Bertrand Westphal reflects on the symbolic meaning of this centrality, showing how the role of Delphi and Parnassus, as navel of the world, was meant to structure and shape the space around them, giving it a direction both in geographical and in spiritual terms.<sup>96</sup>

As already noted, similar things can be said about Dante's Purgatory, a privileged space, located at the exact centre of the southern hemisphere, which responds to a similar need of order and orientation in terms of space, time and faith. In the light of the observations provided in this chapter about the potential points of contacts in Dante's imagination between Parnassian and Edenic elements, this similarity appears even more striking. It almost seems that if we could superimpose the map of the classical world and the map of the universe drawn by Dante, these two mountains – Parnassus and Purgatory – might nearly coincide. On the top of these two mountains, different kinds of poets reveal the same truth in different ways. If the dreams of the

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<sup>96</sup> Westphal, *The Plausible World*, pp. 9-14.

ancient poets on Mount Parnassus do not mean anything, without the right allegorical decryption, Dante's Christian poetry is able to offer an unveiled truth which corrects and contains that of his pagan predecessors.

The classical idea of Parnassus seems to be ultimately contained in Dante's construction of the garden of Eden. In the sounding forest of the Earthly Paradise Dante is purified and his poetry becomes worthy of ascending to heaven with him, revealing all its prophetic content. Part of this process of poetic growth consists in reflecting on the unconscious prophetism of pagan literature, and in Dante's capacity to put himself in relation to it, interpreting it, understanding it, recontextualising it and, eventually, assimilating it. The steps of this complex process of correction and integration, which Dante completes between the end of the second and the beginning of the third cantic, are signaled by the presence of Parnassian images. Reconstructing the connections between these passages and identifying them as part of a broad and intentional metapoetic discourse can guide us to a better understanding of Dante's self-fashioning as the author of a 'sacrato poema'.

## CHAPTER 3

### **‘O BEVVE IN SUA CISTERNA’: BETWEEN EDENIC AND PARNASSIAN WATERS**

The previous chapter analysed the beginning and end of the Earthly Paradise section and discussed a series of references to Parnassian imagery that, more or less explicitly, guide the readers of the *Commedia* in the process of understanding the relationship between classical texts and Christian truth. I focused on Matelda’s statement in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, 139-41, showing how her words take up a line of inquiry that had already emerged in *Purgatorio* XXII and how it is precisely the presence of Parnassus that points at a connection between these two passages of the poem. This system of Parnassian references appears to foster a series of reflections on the relationship between poetry and prophecy and on the act of interpretation, defining not only the role of classical literature in the *Commedia* but also Dante’s own poetic project. This chapter will be devoted to the other main line of inquiry connected with Parnassus that emerged in *Purgatorio* XXII and reappears in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, namely the intersection between Parnassian waters and Dante’s sapiential path. I will analyse the other two explicit references to Parnassus in the Earthly Paradise (in *Purgatorio* XXIX and *Purgatorio* XXXI), which both contain an allusion to the springs of poetic inspiration, putting them in relation to classical and medieval sources and to other passages of Dante’s poem that are in dialogue with Parnassian imagery. My aim is to demonstrate how Dante deploys these images to underline the different stages of his poetic development in the last cantos of *Purgatorio*. I will also show how the references to Parnassian springs are closely intertwined with Dante’s representation of the Edenic rivers, suggesting – once again – a potential overlap between the Parnassian and Edenic landscape, which would also imply a conceptual proximity.

#### 3.1. THE INVOCATION TO THE MUSES IN *PURGATORIO* XXIX: POETRY AS LABOUR

After giving Dante her ‘corollario’ at the end of *Purgatorio* XXVIII, in *Purgatorio* XXIX Matelda starts walking along the Lethe like an ancient nymph and Dante follows her on the other side of

the river.<sup>1</sup> Suddenly, a beam of light ('un lustro subito', line 16) and a sweet sound ('melodia dolce', line 22) announce the beginning of the allegorical procession that will accompany Dante until the end of his Edenic experience.<sup>2</sup> Right before starting his account of this holy pageant, Dante the author pauses in order to ask the Muses for the poetic ability to report what he saw in the wood of the Earthly Paradise:

O sacrosante Vergini, se fami,  
freddi o vigilie mai per voi soffersi,  
cagion mi sprona ch'io mercé vi chiami.  
Or convien che Elicona per me versi,  
e Uranie m'aiuti col suo coro  
forti cose a pensar mettere in versi. (*Purgatorio* XXIX, 37-42)

Before moving to the analysis of line 40 and the reference to Helicon (traditionally identified as the mountain of the Muses and therefore part of the specific mythological imagery that this thesis seeks to map within the *Commedia*), it is useful to contextualise these tercets, putting them in relation to other sections of the poem, in order to understand the role of this passage in the framework of Dante's reflection on Parnassian myths and tropes.

This is the fourth invocation of the *Commedia* and the last one of *Purgatorio*. In terms of invocations, the first and the second cantiche of the poem are perfectly symmetrical, with an opening invocation to the Muses in the first canto and a second invocation – still addressed to the nine sisters – that introduces the final section of the cantica, signaling the necessity of an increased poetic effort.<sup>3</sup> The invocation of *Inferno* XXXII, 10-12 opens the ninth circle of Hell, a place

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<sup>1</sup> For some reflections on the stilnovistic atmosphere of this beginning and its connections with the previous canto, see Paolo Brezzi, 'Il canto XXIX del *Purgatorio*', in *Nuove letture dantesche*, 8 vols (Florence: Le Monnier, 1966-1976), v (1972) 149-165 (pp. 151-152).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the allegories and the meaning of the Edenic procession, see Enzo Noè Girardi, 'Canto XXIX', in *Lectura Dantis Scaligeri*, II. *Purgatorio*, 1069-1095; Brezzi, 'Il canto XXIX del *Purgatorio*'; Andrea Ciotti, 'Processione mistica' in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, IV (1973), 685-89; Bruno Porcelli, 'Canto XXIX', in *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana*, II. *Purgatorio* (1989), 553-577; Giuseppe Ciarovella, '*Purgatorio* XXIX: la processione simbolica', *Critica letteraria*, 40 (2012), 234-64; Sergio Cristaldi, 'Canto XXIX. Simboli in processione', in *Lectura Dantis Romana*, II. *Purgatorio. Canti XVIII-XXXIII* (2014), 867-97.

<sup>3</sup> On the practice of invoking the Muses outside the proem, see Curtius, *European literature*, p. 231, and Gian Biagio Conte, 'Proemi al mezzo'.

inhabited by the traitors and void of any residue of humanity, while this invocation of *Purgatorio* XXIX, 37-42 announces the beginning of the allegorical representation of the history of the Church that Dante needs to remember and report. The thematic connection between these two invocations, both focused on the problem of the effectiveness of Dante's words, is underlined by the repetition of the word 'verso' in both passages. While in *Inferno* XXXII Dante asked the Muses to help his 'verso [...] sì che dal fatto il dir non sia diverso' (lines 10-12), in *Purgatorio* XXIX he needs the nine sisters in order to 'forti cose a pensar mettere in versi' (line 42). The recurrence of the same semantic field in both the invocations shows Dante's concern with the efficacy of his poetry in the last section of the first two cantiche, where his words need to represent a reality that is far beneath the human, in the case of *Inferno*, or that starts to overcome a human dimension, in the case of *Purgatorio*.

The main benchmark for the analysis of this passage, however, is without doubt the opening invocation of *Purgatorio*. These two prayers to the Muses are in open dialogue with each other, and this dialogue help us understand how Dante's poetry evolves in the course of the second cantica, offering further proof that the references to Parnassian imagery in the poem should be studied as part of a transversal system and not just in the self-enclosed context of the cantos where they appear.

First of all, as the first invocation of *Purgatorio* was specifically addressed to Calliope, this passage of *Purgatorio* XXIX presents a particular involvement of another Muse.<sup>4</sup> After a generic prayer to the nine sisters as a whole (lines 37-39), the second tercet of this invocation is addressed to Urania, traditionally identified as the Muse of astronomy and therefore more directly connected with Heaven in the medieval imagination. In Fulgentius' *Mythologiarum libri tres* the goddess is described as 'Urania octava, id est caelestis'.<sup>5</sup> If we look at medieval lexicons and encyclopedias, we can see that she is identified as 'musa astrologica' in *Papias Vocabulista* and again as 'musa celestis' in Uguccione da Pisa's *Derivationes*.<sup>6</sup> John of Garland, commenting on the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses* (and, more precisely, on the episode of the contest between the Muses and the Pierides), talks about Urania's specific connection with the stars, also mentioning her prophetic abilities: 'stellas / Urania numerat hiisque futura nota'.<sup>7</sup> However, Urania already appeared in the

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<sup>4</sup> The invocations of *Inferno*, on the contrary, are both addressed to the Muses in general, without a specific reference to one of the nine sisters ('o muse', *Inferno* II, 8; 'quelle donne [...] / ch'aiutaro Anfione', *Inferno* XXXII, 10-11).

<sup>5</sup> Fulgentius, *Mythologiarum libri tres*, I, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Uguccione da Pisa, *Derivationes*, U 51, 4.

<sup>7</sup> John of Garland, *Integumenta Ovidii* V, 260.

act of observing and interpreting the stars in Cicero's *De divinatione*. In the first book of the treatise, Urania reports some verses of the *De consulatu suo*, an autobiographic work also written by Cicero which is now for the most part lost. The Muse is not presented with any particular attribute but, in her speech, she shows Cicero the favourable astronomical signs that characterised his consulate, as well as the negative signs that foreshadowed Catiline's fall.<sup>8</sup> We can infer that the interpretation of Urania as the Muse most connected to the stars was quite common during the Middle Ages. Fourteenth-century commentators on the *Commedia* all agree on this identification. The presence of Urania in this passage of the poem, right before the start of the procession that anticipates sounds and atmospheres typical of *Paradiso*, can therefore be explained as another sign that Dante's path in the 'earthly' realm of Purgatory is coming to an end and his poetry must now start looking towards the sky.

On a more subtle level, the presence of Urania also recalls the same Ovidian episode that was the main intertext for the first invocation of the cantica and that has been analysed in the previous chapter. The Ovidian account of the poetic contest between the Muses and the Pierides, recalled in the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses*, emerges once again in this second purgatorial invocation. As already mentioned, the protagonist of this poetic contest is Calliope, who beats the Pierides by singing the rapture of Persephone and its consequences. However, in Ovid's account, Calliope does not speak in the first person. It is Urania who welcomes Minerva on Mount Helicon, acting as a sort of spokesperson for the other sisters:

Thebas  
virgineumque Helicon petiit. quo monte potita  
constitit et doctas sic est adfata sorores:  
'fama novi fontis nostras pervenit ad aures,  
dura Medusaei quem praepetis ungula rupit.  
is mihi causa viae; volui mirabile factum  
cernere; vidi ipsum materno sanguine nasci.'

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<sup>8</sup> *De divinatione* I, XI, 17. We find Urania in Ovid's *Fasti* as well. The fifth book opens with a discussion about the aetiology of May where Polyhymnia, Urania and Calliope sustain three different theses. In this text, Urania is not presented with any particular characteristics. However, it is interesting to note that the three Muses that are raised above the others in Ovid's *Fasti* are the same that Dante mentions by the name in the invocations of the *Commedia* (Calliope in *Purgatorio* I, Urania in *Purgatorio* XXIX and Polyhymnia in *Paradiso*. XVIII), in addition to the reference to Clio outside the system of the invocations in *Purgatorio* XXII.

excipit Uranie: 'quaecumque est causa videndi  
has tibi, diva, domos, animo gratissima nostro es'. (*Metamorphoses* V, 253-61)

The presence of both Urania and Helicon in these lines suggests the possibility that Ovid's text is still in Dante's mind when he composes *Purgatorio* XXIX, and confirms the role of the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses* as one on the main literary interlocutors when it comes to Dante's reworking of Parnassian images and figures. The first and the last invocations of *Purgatorio* seem to dialogue, at different levels, with the same Ovidian context. This shared intertextuality creates a sense of order and circularity between the beginning and the end of the cantica, but the fact that some features of the invocation of *Purgatorio* I are not only recalled but also developed in *Purgatorio* XXIX indicates that within this space Dante's poetry has evolved and has become ready to face new representative and conceptual challenges.

This development is already evident if we look at the characterisation of the Muses in *Purgatorio* XXIX and we put it in relation with how the nine sisters are depicted in the previous invocations of the poem. In this analysis, we may notice that process of 'Christianisation' of the Muses signaled by Robert Hollander in one of his studies on the invocations of the *Commedia*.<sup>9</sup> The American scholar stresses the fact that, from simple 'muse' and 'donne' in *Inferno* II, 7 and *Inferno* XXXII, 10, in the course of the second cantica the Muses acquire new Christian traits. They become 'sante' in *Purgatorio* I, 8, and then, with a significant increase of Christian (and specifically Marian) connotations, 'sacrosante Vergini' in *Purgatorio* XXIX. In the fourteenth century, Francesco da Buti, commenting on this passage, already detected the intensification suggested by the comparison between the two adjectives, defining the Muses of *Purgatorio* XXIX as sacred to God:

*sacrum* è la cosa santa quanto s'appartiene a Dio, e *sanctum* è la cosa ordinata et indicata inviolabile quanto al mondo, la quale violata merita pena, e però di queste due dizioni si fa una: imperò che ogni cosa sacra è santa; ma non ogni cosa santa è però sacra [...] e però dice l'autore che le Muse non solamente sono sante, che non è licito di violarle

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<sup>9</sup> See Hollander, 'Dante's nine invocations revisited'. Hollander analyses the invocations of the *Commedia*, maintaining that the progressive Christianisation of the Muses eventually leads towards a refusal of the inspiration granted by the nine sisters. According to him, in the course of *Paradiso* the Muses are gradually ousted from Dante's poetry. Their role is replaced by Apollo in *Paradiso* I, 13-36, by the stars of the constellation of Gemini in *Paradiso* XXII, 112-123, and by God himself in *Paradiso* XXX, 97-99 and XXXIII 67-75. In Chapter 4, I will offer an alternative reading of the presence of the Muses (and other Parnassian deities) in the third cantica of the poem.

secondo lo mondo; ma eziandio sono sacrosante; cioè sante per sacramento di Dio:  
imperò che a lui consecrate. (Francesco da Buti, on *Purgatorio* XXIX, 139-42)

This is the highest level of ‘Christianisation’ reached by the Muses in the poem. After this point, in the third cantica of the *Commedia*, Dante will need the support of different entities in order to complete his poetic project. As I will discuss in the next chapter, Dante’s *Paradiso* opens with an invocation to Apollo which interrupts the series of invocations to the Muses of the first two cantiche and paves the way for new sources of inspiration. Departing from the perfect symmetry of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, the third cantica of the poem presents five invocations, of which only two are addressed to mythological figures connected with Parnassus, namely Apollo in *Paradiso* I, 13-36, and a non-specified Muse (a ‘diva Pegasëa’) in *Paradiso* XVIII, 82-87. I will explore the presence and the function of Parnassian imagery at the beginning of *Paradiso* in the course of the next chapter. For now, it is important to notice that, once again, the cantos of the Earthly Paradise constitute a crucial passage of the *Commedia*, a moment of transition not only for Dante’s experience as a pilgrim but also for his growth as a poet. As the distribution and the addressees of the invocations of the *Commedia* show, there is a before and an after the Earthly Paradise in Dante’s poetry, and the analysis of the references to Parnassian imagery all point to this decisive juncture of the poem.

Similar observations on the development of certain features from the invocation of *Purgatorio* I to that of *Purgatorio* XXIX, can be made for Dante’s declaration of loyalty contained in lines 37-39: ‘se fami, / freddi o vigilie mai per voi sofferesi / cagion mi sprona ch’io mercé vi chiami’. Once again, we can establish a connection with the first invocation of the cantica, where the poet stated his devotion to the Muses by saying: ‘Ma qui la morta poesì resurga, / o sante Muse, poi che vostro sono’ (*Purgatorio* I, 7-8). Declarations of this kind were quite common in classical literature. In her study of the ancient language of prayers and its reception throughout the Christian Middle Ages, Ricarda Liver defines this *topos* as ‘Loyalitätsbekundung’ (declaration of loyalty).<sup>10</sup> When she analyses the syntactic structure of the classical prayers to gods in literary texts, she also mentions, as a variant of this trope, the form *si bene quid merui*, in which the poet shows his devotion by listing a series of merits that would please the gods, often introducing them with the hypothetical and mitigating form *si* (if), just as Dante does in *Purgatorio* XXIX.<sup>11</sup> The scholar quotes several examples

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<sup>10</sup> Ricarda Liver, *Die Nachwirkung der antiken Sakralsprache im christlichen Gebet des lateinischen und italienischen Mittelalters: Untersuchungen zu den syntaktischen und stilistischen Formen dichterisch gestalteter Gebete von den Anfängen der lateinischen Literatur bis zu Dante* (Bern: Francke, 1979), pp. 256-257.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. pp. 272-273.

for this kind of prayer, some of them from texts that were very familiar to Dante, such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Statius' *Thebaid*.<sup>12</sup>

The peculiarity of Dante's invocation of *Purgatorio* XXIX, compared to these examples, is in the combination between the codified *si merui*-form and the lists of sacrifices that he made in the name of poetry ('se fami, / freddi o vigilie mai per voi sofferesi'). The idea of art as sacrifice and labour that emerges from these lines also has a very long literary history. If we look at Ovid's *Tristia*, for example, we find very similar images:

Acceptum refero versibus esse nocens.  
Hoc pretium curae vigilatorumque laborum  
cepimus: ingenio est poena reperta meo. (*Tristia* II, 9-11)

Here, Ovid is lamenting the pain he received in exchange for his devotion to the Muses. He uses words such as *cura* and *labor*, which were typically associated with the idea of art as the result of the poet's sacrifices and sufferings,<sup>13</sup> and the verb *vigilare*, which involves the same semantic field of the vigil mentioned by Dante in *Purgatorio* XXIX ('vigilie').<sup>14</sup> The same idea of the work of literature

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<sup>12</sup> In the ninth book of the *Aeneid*, for example, Nisus invokes Diana with the *si*-form, mentioning his devotion and the devotion of his ancestors (*Aeneid* IX, 404-09), while in the twelfth book, Turnus invokes Mother Earth in the same way (*Aeneid* XII, 777-79). In both cases, the request contained in the prayer is connected with war, not with poetry. A similar invocation can be found in *Metamorphoses* VIII, 350-51, when Mopsus asks Apollo to guide his spear against the Calydonian Boar ('Phoebe [...] sit e coluique colloque, da mihi quod petitur certo contingere telo'). The tenth book of the *Thebaid* also contains an invocation to Apollo (this time in his role of prophet), with the same *si*-formula: 'Si non dedecui tua iussa tulique prementem, / saepe veni, saepe hanc dignare inrumpere mentem' (*Thebaid* X, 340-41). The same *si*-structure is employed in Oedipus' invocation to infernal deities in *Thebaid* I, 60-74 ('Si bene quid merui, si me de matre cadentem / fovisti gremio [...] / si stagna peti Cirrhaea bicorni / interfusa iugo [...] / si Sphingos iniquae callidus ambages te praemonstrante resolvi / [...]'). A similar prayer, addressed to the Eumenides (goddesses of vengeance), can be found in Lucan, *Pharsalia* VI, 706-712.

<sup>13</sup> On this, see Irma Ciccarelli, *Commento al II libro dei 'Tristia' di Ovidio* (Bari: Edipuglia, 2003), pp. 38-39.

<sup>14</sup> For the connection between poetry and vigil, Ciccarelli also highlights another passage from the *Tristia* (I, I, 105-08): 'Cum tamen in nostrum fueris penetrare receptus / contigerisque tuam, scrinia curva, domum, / aspicias illic positos ex ordine fratres / quos studium cunctos evigilavit idem'. In Dante's work, this connection can also be detected in the *Egloghe*, when Dante talks about a 'Musa insonne': 'O Melibee, decus vatum, quoque nomen in auras / fluxit, et insomnem vix Mopsus Musa peregit' (*Egloghe* II, 36-37). A similar idea emerges in the *Convivio* as well, when Dante mentions the nights that he spent studying philosophy: 'Oh quante notti furono, che li occhi dell'altre persone chiusi dormendo si posavano, che li miei nello abitaculo del mio amore fisamente miravano!' (*Convivio* III, 1). Dante's

as *labor* can be found in a passage from the third book of the *Ars amatoria*, where Ovid states that glory is the only thing that the poet asks in return for his efforts: ‘Quid petitur sacris, nisi tantum fama, poetis? / Hoc votum nostri summa laboris habet’ (*Ars amatoria* III, 403-404). A few lines later, lamenting the underestimation of a life devoted to the arts, Ovid weaves together the semantic fields of vigil and pain, connecting them to the figure of the Muses:

Nunc hederæ sine honore iacent, operataque doctis  
cura vigil Musis nomen inertis habet.  
Sed famæ vigilare iuvat. (*Ars amatoria* III, 411-13)<sup>15</sup>

In Ovid’s words, poetry appears as a ‘cura vigil operata doctis Musis’. This idea seems to be persistent in Dante’s mind. When the image of Parnassus emerges again in the Earthly Paradise, in *Purgatorio* XXXI, Dante refers to the pallor of the poets, activating a semantic field that is still close to the idea of suffering and devotion and connecting it to the image of Parnassian waters: ‘chi palido si fece sotto l’ombra / sì di Parnaso, o bevve in sua cisterna’ (lines 140-41). As I will discuss in the third section of this chapter, which will be devoted to the analysis of Parnassian references in *Purgatorio* XXXI, becoming pale on Mount Parnassus is an indication of devotion to poetry as much as drinking from the springs of poetic inspiration. The classical *topos* of poetic labour therefore becomes an important element of Dante’s self-fashioning as a poet and it is not by chance that this idea is linked by Dante to Parnassian imagery in the course of the second cantica. Once again, following the trail of Parnassian references allows us to recognise an evolution in Dante’s poetry.

Perhaps Dante’s most significant reuse of the *topos* of the *cura vigil* can be found in *Paradiso* XXV, in a passage that is extremely important for Dante’s self-representation, where he states his poetic pride and claims his right to be crowned as a poet in Florence, insisting again on the connection between poetry, sacrifice and – metaphorically – thinness:

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relationship with Ovid’s *Tristia* is still debated by scholars but what is important on this occasion is to underline the circulation of some *topoi* in the texts of Latin authors that may have reached the Middle Ages in different ways. On Dante’s relation to Ovid’s poetry of exile see Michelangelo Picone, ‘Dante, Ovidio e la poesia dell’esilio’, in Picone, *Scritti danteschi*, pp. 223-37; Giorgio Brugnoli, ‘L’Ovidio dell’esilio nell’esilio di Dante’, *Linguistica e Letteratura*, 41, 1-2 (2016), 13-35; Catherine Keen, ‘Dante e la risposta ovidiana all’esilio’, in *Miti figure metamorfosi. L’Ovidio di Dante*, ed. by Carlota Cattermole and Marcello Ciccuto (Florence: Le Lettere, 2019), pp. 111-138; Black, ‘Antiquity’, pp. 307-08.

<sup>15</sup> See also *Ars amatoria* II, 285-286, where Ovid talks about a ‘vigilatum carmen’.

Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro  
 al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra,  
 sì che m'ha fatto per molti anni macro,  
 vinca la crudeltà che fuor mi serra  
 del bello ovile ov'io dormi' agnello,  
 nimico ai lupi che li danno guerra;  
 con altra voce omai, con altro vello  
 ritornerò poeta, e in sul fonte  
 del mio battesimo prenderò 'l cappello. (*Paradiso* XXV, 1-12)

In *Paradiso* XXV, the *topos* of painful devotion to poetry which we can glimpse in the invocation of *Purgatorio* I and which is further developed in the invocation of *Purgatorio* XXIX, reaches its apex. It is interesting to note how this idea is once again intertwined with an image of water, at line 11. This time, however, the waters that accompany Dante's self-representation as a poet painfully devoted to his art are not the springs of Helicon, as in *Purgatorio* XXIX, or those of Parnassus' 'cisterna', as in *Purgatorio* XXXI. At this point of the *Commedia*, Dante's validation as a poet comes from a different kind of 'fonte', that of his own baptism: 'in sul fonte / del mio battesimo prenderò 'l cappello' (lines 11-12). The implications of this statement are numerous and many scholars have reflected on the importance of these tercets for the definition of Dante's identity as a poet, as an exile and as a Christian.<sup>16</sup> In the context of this study, however, it is relevant to recognise the development of a certain *topos* and to reflect on the fact that, in the passage between the second and the third cantica, there is a switch from Parnassian to Christian imagery in Dante's discourse on poetic labour. Tropes and rhetorical elements connected to the classical mountain of poetry are

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<sup>16</sup> For some analyses of *Paradiso* XXV, with a focus on this specific metapoetic passage, see Stefano Prandi, 'Canto XXV. "Ritornerò poeta"', in *Lectura Dantis Romana*, III. II *Paradiso. Canti XVIII-XXXIII* (2015), pp. 723-46; Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 'Canto XXV', in *Lectura Dantis Neapolitana*, III. *Paradiso* (2000), 485-99; Edoardo Fumagalli, 'Canto XXV', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*, III. *Paradiso* (2002), 391-404; Villa, 'Corona, mitria, alloro e cappello'; Claire Honess, "'Ritornerò poeta...': Florence, Exile, and Hope", in *Se mai continga...: Exile, Politics and Theology in Dante*, ed. by Claire Honess and Matthew Treherne (Ravenna: Longo, 2013), pp. 85-103; Paola Rigo, "'Prenderò 'l cappello'", in Rigo, *Memoria classica e memoria biblica*, pp. 135-63; Giuseppe Ledda, 'L'esilio, la speranza, la poesia: modelli biblici e strutture autobiografiche nel canto XXV del *Paradiso*', *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, 90, 1 (2015), 257-77.

gradually re-thought and assimilated in the course of the second cantica, and ultimately transformed in *Paradiso*.

This recontextualisation is carefully prepared by Dante. If, as shown in Chapter 2, the invocation of *Purgatorio* I already contained some elements of ambiguity that challenged the readers' interpretative sensibility, in the address to the Muses of *Purgatorio* XXIX the process of integration between Parnassian imagery and Christian elements is made more explicit. The *topos* of the *cura vigil* that opens the invocation is, in this case, closely intertwined with a biblical reference. Lines 37-38 are structured according to classical rhetoric but contain a clear reference to St Paul's *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, in which the author lists the sacrifices that he made in the name of Christ: 'in labore et aerumnia, in vigiliis multis, in fame et siti, in ieiuniis multis, in frigore et nuditate' (2 Cor. 11, 27).<sup>17</sup> In this passage, we can see not only the presence of the semantic fields of *labor* and *vigilia*, already detected in the Ovidian passages quoted above, but also a reference to *fames* and *frigor*, two elements that Dante uses in his invocation to the Muses and that were absent in Ovid's texts. Once again, the passages of the poem that involve the presence of Parnassian images appear as a space of encounter between classical and Christian elements and constitute a moment of reflection on the poetry of the *Commedia* itself. It is only through a careful analysis of these passages, and through a comparison between each of these passages and the others, that we can grasp some aspects of Dante's poetic development and better understand the mechanisms of the dialogue between classical poetry and Christian inspiration inside the *Commedia*.

### 3.2 'OR CONVIEN CHE ELICONA PER ME VERSI': *PURGATORIO* XXIX AND THE WATERS OF HELICON

The final aspect of this invocation that needs to be analysed in order to understand the role of this specific passage in the system of Parnassian references distributed in the *Commedia* is Dante's mention of Helicon at line 40 ('or conven che Elicon a per me versi'), which brings to the fore the imagery connected to Parnassian waters. As many scholars have noted, Dante's words recall a passage from the seventh book of the *Aeneid* where, before starting the description of the war between the Trojans and the Latins, Virgil invokes the Muses and asks Helicon to pour its waters:

Pandite nunc Helicon, deae, cantusque movete

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<sup>17</sup> See Ledda, 'Invocazioni e preghiere', pp. 139-40.

qui bello exciti reges, quae quemque sacutae  
 complerint campos acies, quibus Italia iam tum  
 floruerit terra alma viris, quibus arserit armis.  
 Et meministis enim, divae, et memorare potestis:  
 ad nos vix tenuis famae perlabitur aura. (*Aeneid* VII 641-46)

Dante seems to replicate Virgil's invocation, using the same idea of pouring ('versi') expressed by the Virgilian 'pandite'. The first commentators on the *Commedia* often interpreted the word 'versi' in the sense of 'versificare' (writing verses),<sup>18</sup> but the potential connection with Virgil's text makes it more plausible to think about a reference to the waters of poetic inspiration. Among Dante's early commentators, only Francesco da Buti seems to recognise the sense of Dante's 'versi': 'versi: cioè dell'abundanzia sua metta fuori sì, che ammaestri me tanto che mi vasti a questa materia che io abbo a scrivere'.<sup>19</sup> This interpretation, in a minority during the fourteenth century, was resumed and preferred from the end of the fifteenth century onwards, and the idea of pouring expressed in Dante's lines was connected not only with generic abundance (as in the comment of Francesco da Buti) but with the waters of poetic inspiration.

The confusion of the early commentators in the interpretation of this passage, however, is not limited to the meaning of the verb *versare*. A lot of misunderstandings can also be detected as regards the identification of Helicon. The story of this mythological place in medieval culture is quite complex. In this section of Chapter 3, I will offer a brief overview of the image of Helicon during the Middle Ages and I will try to better define Dante's idea of this classical place connected with poetry. The correct reconstruction of Dante's representation of Helicon and its waters can help us understand Dante's use of Parnassian imagery in his depiction of the garden of Eden. If, as discussed in Chapter 1, the waters of poetic inspiration were one of the main images associated with Parnassus in the *Commedia*, in the course of this chapter I will show how Dante seems to create subtle but significant links between Parnassian and Edenic waters in the last section of *Purgatorio*. As happens for the reflection on prophecy and poetry, the references to the springs of poetic inspiration guide a series of metapoetic thoughts that culminate in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise.

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the commentaries on this passage by Iacomo della Lana, the Ottimo commento, Benvenuto da Imola, the Anonimo fiorentino and Giovanni di Serravalle.

<sup>19</sup> Francesco da Buti, on *Purgatorio* XXIX, 31-42.

As anticipated in Chapter 1, according to classical mythology, Helicon was a mountain in Boeotia inhabited by the Muses.<sup>20</sup> Like Parnassus, it was mentioned by poets as a sacred place and depicted as rich in waters that were metaphorically associated with poetic inspiration. The most famous of Helicon's spring was Hippocrene, generated by the winged horse Pegasus (born from the blood of the Medusa, decapitated by Perseus), who kicked the side of the mountain with his hoof.<sup>21</sup> The episode is recalled in the passage from *Metamorphoses* V that has already been mentioned several times in the course of this thesis. Ovid explains that Minerva reached Helicon in order to see this new miraculous spring of water.<sup>22</sup> On the same occasion, he also identifies the mountain as specifically sacred to the Muses: 'virgineum Helicon' (*Metamorphoses* V, 254).

Following the texts of classical authors, all the modern commentators of the *Commedia* properly interpret Dante's allusion to Helicon as a reference to the mountain dedicated to the nine sisters. This interpretation, however, does not take into account the representation of Helicon in medieval mythography. In fact, as already mentioned, the role of the Muses as patrons of poetry often led to a superimposition of the cult of the nine sisters onto the imagery connected with Parnassus. This, together with the fact that Apollo (the Parnassian deity par excellence) and the Muses were often mentioned together, and that Helicon and Parnassus presented similar characteristics and functions, may have caused some confusion in the medieval imagination. Medieval mythographers often interpreted Helicon as one of Parnassus' peaks. This tradition probably dates back to Servius' commentary on Virgil, where the two crests of Parnassus were identified as Helicon and Cithaeron: 'Parnasus, mons Thessaliae, dividitur in Cithaeronem Liberi et Heliconem Apollinis, cuius sunt musae' (on *Aeneid* VII, 641). The same identification can be found in the commentaries on other Latin texts, such as the *Supplementum adnotationum super Lucanum* and Arnulf of Orleans' commentary on the *Pharsalia*,<sup>23</sup> and is inherited by medieval mythographers as well. Isidore of Seville, for example, claims that the two peaks of Parnassus are named Nissa or Cithaeron, inhabited by Bacchus, and Cyrrha or Helicon, inhabited by Apollo: 'Parnasus mons Thessaliae iuxta Beotiam, qui gemino vertice est erectus in caelum. Hic in duo finditur iuga: Cyrrham et Nissam; [...] eo quod in singulis iugis colebantur Apollo et Liber. Haec iuga a duobus

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<sup>20</sup> For bibliographical references, see Chapter 1.

<sup>21</sup> The other spring that was believed to be on Mount Helicon was Aganippe (see Fritz Graf, 'Aganippe', in *Brill's New Pauly. Antiquity*, I (2002), 307.

<sup>22</sup> *Metamorphoses* V, 250-63.

<sup>23</sup> See the *Supplementum adnotationum super Lucanum* on V, 95 or Arnulf of Orléans' *Glosule super Lucanum*, on V, 72.

fratribus Cithaeron et Helicon appellantur'.<sup>24</sup> This means that, in Dante's imagination, the image and the function of Helicon and Parnassus may have overlapped. The same confusion about these two mountains can be detected in all the fourteenth-century commentaries on the *Commedia* as well, which probably relied on the same sources as Dante. As already observed in Chapter 1, when Dante refers to the mountain of the Muses in *Purgatorio* XXII, calling it the 'monte / che sempre ha le nutrice nostre seco' (lines 104-05), all the early commentators on the poem agree in interpreting this mountain as Parnassus, not Helicon. The issue of the medieval representation of Parnassus and the problem of the correct identification of the different parts and functions of this mountain will be fully investigated in the next chapter. For now, it is useful to remember that, when he talks about Helicon, Dante is probably referring to the same physical and metaphorical concept of Parnassus. This is why, in the context of this study on Dante's re-elaboration of Parnassian imagery in the *Commedia*, this specific passage is analysed as one of those Parnassian references that Dante distributes and arranges with careful attention in certain passages of the poem, with a precise poetic intention.

If we look at the medieval commentaries on these lines of *Purgatorio* XXIX, the situation appears even more confused. Dante's request to Helicon that it pour (*versare*) its waters for him led his early commentators to interpret Helicon not as a peak of Parnassus, but as one of its springs. Iacomo della Lana, for example, commenting on *Purgatorio* XXIX, 40, writes, 'Elicona, siccome scriveno li poeti, sì era una fontana che era sul monte Parnaso, in la quale andavano a bere li poeti quando si conventavano in poetria, in modo di stagno'. The Anonymus Lombardus reports the same idea of Helicon as a spring located on Parnassus, from which poets used to drink in search of poetic inspiration.<sup>25</sup> The author of the *Ottimo Comento* seems aware of the fact that Helicon was considered the mountain of the Muses in classical tradition, as we can see from his commentary on *Inferno* IX where he describes the myth of Pegasus:

E come dice di sopra Teseo prese il regno di Medussa, tagliòle la texta, sparòle il ventre;  
del cui sangue nacque il Pegaso, cioè il cavallo con l'alie; lo quale corendo a monte

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<sup>24</sup> *Etymologiarum libri* XIV, VIII, 11.

<sup>25</sup> 'Dicit autor quod Eliconia fuit quidam fons in Parnaso monte, in quo fonte potabant poete, quasi in modum comentacionis' (ad *Purgatorio* XXIX, 40-42).

Elicona cavòe la terra e produsse fuori una fontana dove beono le Muse e li poeti.  
(*Ottimo commento*, ad *Inferno* IX, 37-42)<sup>26</sup>

He confirms this idea in his commentary on *Purgatorio* XXII, 104-105, where he claims that Helicon is one of Parnassus' peaks: 'Questi due giòchi da due fratelli Citeron ed Elecon furono appellati'. On this occasion, however, he adds that the second peak of the mountain (Helicon) also gives its name to a spring of water with the power of restoring memory: 'e da questo Elecon è nominata una fonte ch'è in su quel monte, chiamata Elicona, ristorativa della memoria'.<sup>27</sup> All the other medieval commentators on the *Commedia* agree in identifying Helicon as one of the peaks of Parnassus but also one of its springs. In the first version of his commentary, Pietro Alighieri, identifies Helicon as one of the two crests of Parnassus when he comments on *Paradiso* I, 16-18.<sup>28</sup> In his comments on *Purgatorio* XXIX, 37-42, however, he also states that 'item virtutem Heliconis fontis, rigantis montaneam, quae dicitur Helicon, consecratam Musis, idest scientiis, et existentem juxta Parnassum'. The same double identification of Helicon persists in the third version of his commentary, where, commenting on *Purgatorio* I, 1-12, he includes Helicon in the list of Parnassus' springs ('et apud montem Parnasi morantes, et Eliconam et Castaliam et Aganipes, eius Parnasi fontes') and, explaining the invocation of *Purgatorio* XXIX, he writes, 'premissa invocatione per eum facta ad fontem Elicone'.<sup>29</sup> The same association can be found in Benvenuto da Imola's exegesis. In his comment on *Purgatorio* I, 7-9 he reports the episode from the *Metamorphoses* when Minerva reaches Helicon to talk with the Muses (*Metamorphoses* V, 250-59). In his interpretation, however, Helicon is a fountain and not a mountain: 'Pallas dea sapientiae cum venisset ad visendum Parnasum montem celeberrimum poetarum, de quo plene dicam primo capitulo Paradisi, et Heliconem pulcerrimum fontem illius montis, commendata amoenitate loci, vocavit Musas felices ratione loci et studii'. We find the same idea in many other passages of Benvenuto's work, such as the comments on *Purgatorio* XXII, 64-73 ('a ber nelle sue grotte, idest, ad hauriendum de fonte heliconio amoenissimo'), on *Purgatorio* XXIX, 37-43 ('Elicona, fons

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<sup>26</sup> Also, a few lines later: 'Il Pegaso corre al monte della sapientia, cioè Elicona, e producene fuori uno rivo, cioè le scienze, che sono a contentare il disiderio di coloro che vogliono sapere in materia di Scripture'.

<sup>27</sup> This idea is confirmed in the commentary on *Purgatorio* XXXI, 139-41: 'in sua cisterna, cioè nella fonte Elicona'.

<sup>28</sup> 'Dextrum jugum dicitur Helicon: sinistrum Cithaeron. In Helicone erat Cirrha civitas, in qua Apollo colebatur'.

<sup>29</sup> See also the commentary on *Purgatorio* XXXI, 139-45: 'ut nullus poeta in parnaso bibens de eius citerna, idest de eius fonte Elicona, vix posset enarrare'.

Parnasi') and on *Purgatorio* XXXI, 139-45 ('o bevve più in sua cisterna, et qui poeta plus hausit de fonte Parnasi, qui dictus est Helicon, de quo dixit supra cum invocaret musas').

Francesco da Buti is the only fourteenth-century commentator who seems to prefer the idea of Helicon as a mountain (one of the two peaks of Parnassus).<sup>30</sup> In his interpretation of the invocation to the Muses in *Purgatorio* XXIX, however, he states that, even if Helicon was a mountain, on this particular occasion Dante uses its name to identify the spring of poetic inspiration:

Elicon è uno de iughi di Parnaso, in sul quale era la città u' era lo studio de la teoria de le scienze, et appresso u' era la fonte Castalio che si chiama la fonte de le Muse; la quale fonte figurava la influenza indeficiente de le scienze che quive era; e però dice che ora conviene che Elicona, e pone qui Elicona per la fonte de le Muse, per me; cioè Dante, versi; cioè dell'abundanzia sua metta fuori. (Francesco da Buti, on *Purgatorio* XXIX, 31-42)

The idea of Helicon as a spring of water was therefore quite common among the first Dante commentators, and the syntactic structure of the sentence in *Purgatorio* XXIX would allow this interpretation. However, there is no trace of this identification in the main medieval mythographers, with the exception of a passage from *Papias Vocabulista* in which the 'Castalius fons' is also called 'pegaseus vel heliconaus'. If the hypothesis that Dante thought about Helicon as a fountain cannot definitely be ruled out, the texts of medieval encyclopedists seem to point in a different direction. It appears more likely that, by mentioning Helicon, Dante actually referred to a mountain which, however, might have been conceived as a place that was not separate from Parnassus. Moreover, as already shown in the previous chapter, Dante must have been quite familiar with the episode from *Metamorphoses* V which recalls the story of the Pierides and starts with Minerva's arrival on Helicon, clearly described as a *mons* by Ovid ('virgineumque Helicon petit. Quo monte potita / constitit et doctas sic est adfata sorores', lines 254-55). For the purposes of this study, however, it is important to underline the centrality of the image of water in this invocation, and the strong conceptual link between this source of water and poetic inspiration.

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<sup>30</sup> See Francesco da Buti's comments on *Purgatorio* XXII 64-93, *Purgatorio* XXVIII 138-48, *Purgatorio* XXXI 139-45, *Paradiso* I 13-36 and *Paradiso* XVIII, 82-93.

That the equivalence between certain waters and poetic talent was clear in Dante's mind can be confirmed by a passage of the *De vulgari eloquentia*. In the second book of his treatise, talking about the *stilus tragicus*, Dante establishes which topics can be treated in the highest style, namely 'Salus, Amor et Virtus'.<sup>31</sup> In order to talk about these subjects – Dante claims – the poet must refine his art and prepare himself adequately, making sure that he drinks from the waters of Helicon before approaching this poetic challenge: 'Caveat ergo quilibet et discernat ea que dicimus; et quando tria hec pure cantare intendit, vel que ad ea directe ac pure secuntur, prius Elicone potatus, tensis fidibus, adsumptum secure plectrum tum movere incipiat'.<sup>32</sup> The inspiration granted by the waters of the classical mountain of poetry are here connected with the highest – and more Christian – subjects that a poet can write about. In the following paragraph, Dante adds that this preparation requires an effort (*a labor*, once again), because this competence cannot be achieved with talent and genius alone. It also requires study and practice: 'hoc opus et labor est, quoniam numquam sine strenuitate ingenii et artis assiduitate scientiarumque habitu fieri potest'.<sup>33</sup> The *topos* of artistic labour and the idea of the waters of poetic inspiration already appear intertwined in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, showing how certain images were well impressed in Dante's imagination and particularly effective for his reflections on poetry.

In the *Commedia*, however, these images acquire much wider implications because they are included in a much wider metaphorical system. The reference to the springs of Helicon (or possibly to Helicon as a spring) in *Purgatorio* XXIX links back to one of the main themes connected to Parnassus that emerged from the analysis of *Purgatorio* XXII, where Statius represents his poetic inspiration in terms of drinking from the waters of Parnassus ('tu prima m'inviaisti / verso Parnaso a ber ne le sue grotte', lines 64-65). As happens for the reflection on poetry and prophecy raised in *Purgatorio* XXII in connection to Parnassian images and taken up by Matelda in the garden of Eden, now the reference to Parnassian waters creates another line of dialogue between *Purgatorio* XXII and the cantos of the Earthly Paradise.

Chapter 1 discussed the intersection between Dante's references to Parnassian waters and the motif of sapiential thirst, reflecting on the interactions between classical poetry and Christian knowledge within the *Commedia*. At the end of the cantica, Dante's allusion to the classical springs of poetic inspiration suggests that that reflection is still ongoing. In the cantos of the Earthly

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<sup>31</sup> *De vulgari eloquentia* II, IV, 8. For a detailed commentary on this passage, see the edition of the *De vulgari eloquentia* in *Nuova edizione commentata delle opere di Dante*, 8 vols. (Rome: Salerno, 2015-2021), III (2012), pp. 168-69.

<sup>32</sup> *De vulgari eloquentia*, II, IV, 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Paradise, which mark the passage between the earthly and the heavenly part of Dante's journey, Dante makes sure that he drinks from the waters of Helicon before facing his last poetic effort and addressing the most challenging topics of this poem. His sapiential and poetic growth move in parallel.

Further insight into this reference to the Heliconian waters can be provided by an analysis of medieval mythography, which confirms the connection between the waters of poetic inspiration and wisdom. In his *Mythologiarum libri tres*, in the context of the *fabula Bellerofonti*, Fulgentius offers an interpretation of the winged horse Pegasus, responsible for the creation of one of Helicon's springs, and its connection with the concept of *sapientia*.<sup>34</sup> Fulgentius interprets the figure of Bellerophon as 'bule-forunta, quod nos Latine sapientiae consulatorem dicimus' and depicts his deeds as an allegorical combat against *libido*, natural enemy of wisdom. On the figure of Pegasus (traditional ally of Bellerophon), he adds:

At vero Bellerofons, id est bona consultatio, qualem equum sedet nisi Pegasus, quasi pegaseon, id est fontem aeternum. Sapientia enim bonae consultationis aeternus fons est. Ideo pinnatus, quia universam mundi naturam celeri cogitationum teoria conlustrat. Ideo et Musarum fontem ungula sua rupisse fertur; sapientia enim dat Musis fontem. Ob hac re etiam sanguine Gorgonae nascitur; Gorgona enim pro terrore ponitur; ideo et in Minervae pectore fixa est, sicut Homerus in tertio decimo ait: τῇ δ' ἐπὶ μὲν Γοργῶ βλοσυρῶπις ἔστεφάνωτο. (*Mythologiarum libri tres* III, 1)<sup>35</sup>

In Fulgentius' account, Pegasus, born from the blood of the Gorgon (allegory of terror), becomes a symbol of wisdom, 'fons aeternum' of the 'bonae consultationis'. From this perspective, the spring of water that he creates is said to be on the mountain of the Muses because 'sapientia [...]

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<sup>34</sup> *Mythologiarum libri tres*, III 1.

<sup>35</sup> In the *fabula Persei et Gorgonarum* (*Mythologiarum libri tres* I, 21), Fulgentius also reports another interpretation of Pegasus as fame ('De sanguine eius nasci fertur Pegasus in figura famae constitutus'), connected to the Muses because poets contribute to the fame of the heroes by recalling their deeds ('Ideo et Musis fontem ungula sua rupisse fertur, quod Musae ad describendum famam heroum aut sequantur proprium aut indicent antiquorum'). The same interpretation is reported by John of Garland (*Integumenta Ovidii* V, 243: 'Pegasus admissus est fama volatilis') and Arnulf of Orléans (*Allegoriae super Ovidii Metamorphosen* V, 4-5: 'De sanguine Gorgonis natus est Pegasus [...] i. per virtutem, nata est bona fama. Que ideo fingitur equus quia velociter currit, et alas fingitur habere quia non solum videtur currere sed volare. Pegasus vero fingitur fontem crease sacratum musis quia quicumque musis et studio vacat pro fama hec facit au tut ipse famam habeat, au tut illi de quibus tractat').

dat Musis fontem'. In Fulgentius' allegorical interpretation, poetic inspiration, represented by the Heliconian waters, comes directly from wisdom. The relationship between *poesia* and *sapientia* that we find in Fulgentius' text can guide us towards a better understating of Dante's reuse of the image of Parnassian waters in *Purgatorio* XXIX and of the connection between poetic inspiration and sapiential thirst that he seems to establish since *Purgatorio* XXII.

In the cantos of the Earthly Paradise this relationship is re-thought and gradually changed. As I will show in the course of this chapter, the reference to Helicon's waters is not isolated. Dante's insistence on this specific Parnassian image at the end of *Purgatorio* allows us to put different passages in relation to one another and to detect another line of reflection that can fruitfully contribute to our understanding of Dante's evolving relationship with classical literature and, consequently, of his own self-depiction as a poet.

### 3.3 'SOVRA CANDIDO VEL CINTA D'ULIVA': BEATRICE AS MINERVA IN *PURGATORIO* XXX

The third explicit reference to Parnassus in the Earthly Paradise, after Matelda's 'corollario' in *Purgatorio* XXVIII and the reference to Helicon in the invocation of *Purgatorio* XXIX, comes at the end of canto XXXI. This is a very delicate moment for Dante's staging of his personal growth in the *Commedia* and for the definition of his role as an author. Here, in a failed attempt to describe Beatrice's smile, Dante alludes once again to the springs of poetic inspiration. However, before getting to the analysis of the main features of this specific reference, it is necessary to take a step back in order to offer an accurate contextualisation of this passage and understand the broader metapoetic implications of this specific juncture of the poem.

The previous canto, *Purgatorio* XXX, is the canto of the great return of Beatrice. In a carefully woven web of biblical and classical references, the woman of the *Vita nova* finally reappears in front of Dante, veiled and surrounded by flowers.<sup>36</sup> When Dante turns around to tell Virgil – using a quotation from the *Aeneid* – that he recognises in his own body the signs of his juvenile love, the 'dolcissimo patre' is gone, 'n'avea lasciati scemi / di sé', without a word or a sound (lines 49-51). As Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi comments in her introduction to the canto, this is the very centre of the poem, the moment where everything changes and the passage between an earthly and a heavenly dimension, symbolised by the shift from one guide to another, happens:

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<sup>36</sup> *Purgatorio* XXX, 28-33.

Dante non ha stabilito lo stacco fondamentale del suo viaggio all'uscita dall'inferno, tra dannati e salvati, là dove si compie il passaggio tra il mondo dei morti e quello dei vivi, come ci si potrebbe aspettare; ma qua sulla cima della montagna, quando si è già giunti al giardino edenico [...]. E la ragione è che qui si giunge al limite della sostanziale differenza, che è quella tra l'umano, sia pure perfetto, e il divino, tra lo storico e l'eterno [...]. Con Beatrice si entrerà in una dimensione diversa, quella dimensione che il trasumanare, che si compirà già in questo giardino, nel I canto del nuovo regno, vuole significare.<sup>37</sup>

Everything that Dante has done, seen and experienced so far has led him to this point. However, the reconciliation with the beloved woman, who is now much more than the beloved woman, is extremely painful. Dante is still crying for the loss of Virgil when Beatrice starts her reprimand, which lasts until the end of the following canto. Before being allowed to bathe in the waters of Lethe in the last lines of *Purgatorio* XXXI, Dante needs to acknowledge and repent of his sins, of the fact that, after Beatrice's death, he 'volse i passi suoi per via non vera', following deceptive images of happiness that led him astray from her and, therefore, from God. This circumstance, of which the *Vita nova* provides a full account, was the starting point of Dante's journey in the afterworld, the reason why he was lost in a 'selva oscura' at the beginning of the poem and the reason why Beatrice descended to Hell and asked Virgil to help him. As already noted in the previous chapter, the first part of Dante's journey begins in the forest of *Inferno* I and ends in the forest of the Earthly Paradise.

In the course of this dialogue – or trial, we may say – Beatrice is depicted as a strict and severe judge, an 'ammiraglio' says Dante at line 58, who then becomes a 'madre [...] suberba' at line 79, acquiring some of the parental traits that were typical of the figure of Virgil but still maintaining an austere distance between herself and the pilgrim. At line 70, she is depicted as 'regalmente ne l'atto ancora proterva'. It is right before this moment that Dante adds a detail to Beatrice's description which is particularly significant in the context of the study of Parnassian imagery in the *Commedia*. At line 31 Dante had already said that Beatrice appeared 'sovra candido vel cinta d'uliva'. Now he reinforces this image claiming that:

Tutto che 'l vel le scendea di testa,

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<sup>37</sup> Chiavacci Leonardi, Introduction to *Purgatorio* XXX.

cerchiato de le fronde di Minerva,  
non la lasciasse parer manifesta,  
regalmente ne l'atto ancor proterva  
continüò. (*Purgatorio* XXX, 67-71)

The comparison between Beatrice and Minerva at this point of the poem is particularly meaningful. In classical mythology, Minerva was primarily identified as the goddess of wisdom and this main association is inherited by the medieval imagination.<sup>38</sup> Isidore of Seville, in his *Etymologiarum libri*, explains the origin of her name, connecting it with her relationship with the field of arts, and maintains that her birth from the head of Jupiter symbolises her strong tie with what pertains to the human intellect:

Minerva apud Graecos Ἀθήνη dicitur, id est, femina. Apud Latinos autem Minervam vocatam quasi deam et munus artium variarum. Hanc enim inventricem multorum ingeniorum perhibent, et inde eam artem et rationem interpretantur, quia sine ratione nihil potest contineri. Quae ratio, quia ex solo animo nascitur, animumque putant esse in capite et cerebro, ideo eam dicunt de capite Iovis esse natam, quia sensus sapientis, qui invenit omnia, in capite est. (*Etymologiarum libri* VIII, XI, 71-72)

This relationship between Minerva and wisdom is therefore consistent with the role that Beatrice plays from this point of the poem onwards, as the new guide of Dante's journey, the symbol of a new Christian wisdom that replaces the earthly and limited knowledge represented by Virgil. However, it is in the analysis of some specific intertextual relationships that this association between Minerva and Beatrice reveals all its implications, which regard again the image of Parnassus and, consequently, Dante's reflections on his own poetry.

In fact, Minerva's relationship with the area of intellect and with the concepts of knowledge and wisdom also meant a proximity between the goddess and poetry. In his *Ars poetica*, widely known and read during the Middle Ages,<sup>39</sup> Horace claims that the poet cannot say or do anything without Minerva's approval:

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<sup>38</sup> In the *Convivio*, Dante talks about 'Minerva, la quale dissero dea di sapienza' (*Convivio* II, IV, 6).

<sup>39</sup> On the circulation of Horace's texts in the Middle Ages and Dante's interactions with his works, see Claudia Villa, 'Dante lettore di Orazio', in *Dante e la 'bella scola'*, pp. 87-106; Carlo Paolazzi, *La maniera mutata. Il 'dolce stil novo' tra Scrittura e 'Ars Poetica'* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1998); Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Three notes on Dante and Horace', *Reading*

Tu nihil invita dices faciesve Minerva;  
 id tibi iudicium est, ea mens: si quid tamen olim  
 scripseris, in Maeci descendat iudicis aures  
 et patris et nostras, nonumque prematur in annum,  
 membranis intus positis. Delere licebit  
 quod non edideris; nescit vox missa reverti. (*Ars poetica*, 385-90)

In a passage of the poem in which he states that true poetry cannot be mediocre and laments the fact that many people insist on producing poetry despite their inadequacy in this art form, Horace states that poets cannot act without Minerva's consent, which means without wisdom. Horace does not distinguish between different kinds of poetry, different contents or different levels of poetic sophistication. Any type of poetic activity requires Minerva's protection. The connection that the Latin author establishes between poetry and knowledge is explicit and essential. In the lines that follow, Horace goes on talking about the importance of poetry in the building of human society from an ethical, civic and religious point of view. Mentioning mythical figures such as Orpheus and Amphion,<sup>40</sup> both experts in the art of singing and composing verses, Horace claims that there was a time when poetic inspiration and knowledge coincided, and the poets dictated the moral rules by which men and women should abide: 'dictae per carmina sortes, / et vitae monstrata via est' (lines 403-04). This passage ends with an exhortation to not be ashamed of being devoted to Apollo and the Muses, the deities of poetry par excellence: 'ne forte pudori / sit tibi Musa lyrae sollers et cantor Apollo' (lines 406-07). In Horace's *Ars poetica*, Minerva, goddess of wisdom and

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*Medieval Studies*, 27 (2001), 5-37, and Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Magister satiricum: Preliminary Notes on Dante, Horace and the Middle Ages', in *Language and Style in Dante*, ed. by John C. Barnes and Michelangelo Zaccarello (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 13-61; Black, 'Classical Antiquity', pp. 309-10.

<sup>40</sup> The figure of Amphion emerges in the second invocation of *Inferno*, where the Muses are identified as 'quelle donne [...] / ch'aiutaro Anfione a chiuder Tebe' (*Inferno* XXXII, 10-11). On this passage, see John Ahern, 'Canto XXXII. Amphion and the poetics of retaliation', in *Lectura Dantis, Inferno: A Canto-by-Canto Commentary*, ed. by Allen Mandelbaum, Charles Ross and Anthony Oldcorn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 413-23. On the figure of Orpheus, the great absent (but not really absent) of the *Commedia*, see the studies of Stefano Carrai, such as 'Il viaggio a Beatrice e il mito di Orfeo', in Carrai, *Dante e l'antico*, pp. 119-31, and 'Da Euridice a Beatrice: metamorfosi dell'amata defunta', in *Sognare il Parnaso*, pp. 43-56.

knowledge, is presented as patron of poets as much as Apollo and the Muses.<sup>41</sup> Her approval is a fundamental requirement for the kind of poetry that intends to build the foundations of a good society. From this perspective, the fact that Beatrice appears to the poet Dante wearing the ‘fronde di Minerva’ is not surprising given that his final aim is to write ‘in pro del mondo che mal vive’ and to promote a sort of renovation of human society. For a reader of the *Ars poetica*, this detail immediately invests Beatrice with a very specific function and makes her approval a fundamental requirement for the continuation of Dante’s poetic (and prophetic) journey. It is not by chance that this approval must be earned by Dante in the course of a painful confession that happens between *Purgatorio* XXX and XXXI and is aimed at re-establishing Dante’s moral integrity.

The connection between Minerva and poetry is not only detected in Horace’s *Ars poetica*, however. There is another classical intertext, very familiar to the reader of the *Commedia* who has come so far, which involves the mountain of poetry more directly. The episode from the fifth book of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which recalls the poetic contest between the Muses and the Pierides and constitutes – as already discussed – one of the main sources for Dante’s reworking of Parnassian imagery in the *Commedia*, starts with Minerva’s arrival on Mount Helicon. As recalled in the previous chapter, in Ovid’s account the goddess reaches Mount Helicon because she wishes to see with her own eyes the new fountain that was generated by a kick of Pegasus’s hoof, the winged horse born from the blood of the Gorgon, decapitated by Perseus.<sup>42</sup> When Minerva arrives, she is welcomed by the nine sisters, who claim that the goddess would have been a Muse too if she did not have more important responsibilities:

O, nisi te virtus opera ad maiora tulisset,  
in patrem ventura chori Tritonia nostri,  
vera refers meritoque probas artesque locumque,  
et gratam sortem, tutae modo simus, habemus. (*Metamorphoses* V, 269-72)

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<sup>41</sup> It is worth noting that these deities appear together in *Paradiso* II, in a passage that can be considered a sort of second introduction to the last cantica (‘Minerva spira, e conducemi Appollo, / e nove Muse mi dimostran l’Orse’, lines 8-9). I will provide some reflections on these lines in Chapter 4.

<sup>42</sup> It is her thirst for knowledge that brings the goddess to Mount Helicon: ‘Fama novi fontis nostras pervenit ad aures, / dura Medusaei quem praepetis ungula rupit. / Is mihi causa viae: volui mirabile factum / cernere’ (*Metamorphoses* V, 156-59).

Minerva is presented here as a deity very close to the Muses, who differs from the nine sisters not because of a lack of virtue but because of an excess of it, which drives her ‘ad maiora opera’. Once again, Ovid’s text re-emerges and points us in the direction of a comparison. In the invocation of *Purgatorio* I, Dante’s reference to Calliope and to the myth of the Pierides opened a dialogue between the second cantica and this specific episode of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The appearance of Matelda-Persephone in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, together with the description of the Earthly Paradise which included details that made the garden of Eden surprisingly similar to Parnassus, hinted that that dialogue was of central importance, in this specific passage of the poem, for Dante’s definition of his own poetic project. Now, in canto XXX, the parallel between Beatrice and Minerva requires us to take that imagery into account in order to be fully understood. This ongoing intertextual conversation suggests that when Beatrice appears to Dante crowned with olive branches, she not only appears as a new Minerva, symbol of a new Christian wisdom, she also appears as a new Parnassian goddess, who has arrived on the top of a different mountain to judge Dante’s poetry and give it her approval.

An interesting reading of this connection between Minerva and Beatrice, analysed from a metapoetic perspective, is offered by Claudia Villa in an essay from 2017.<sup>43</sup> The scholar follows Dante’s reuse of the passage from *Metamorphoses* V that narrates the contest between the Muses and the Pierides throughout the *Commedia*, showing that the appearances of different parts of this story always have metapoetic implications. In *Inferno* IX, Dante refers to Medusa, mentioned by Ovid in the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses* just before Minerva’s arrival on Mount Helicon.<sup>44</sup> The Gorgon is evoked by the Furies who are guarding the entrance of the City of Dis, and her name immediately terrorises Dante, while Virgil invites him to close his eyes. Villa notes how these verses are followed by Dante’s invitation to his readers to pay attention to ‘la dottrina che s’asconde / sotto ’l velame de li versi strani’ (lines 62-63). By referring to the idea of a veil (the *integumentum*, to use a medieval term), Dante is telling his readers to look beyond the *littera*, to make an interpretative effort in order to grasp the hidden meaning of his words. In *Inferno* XXV, when Dante, talking about the metamorphoses of the thieves in the seventh bolgia, states ‘taccia di Cadmo e d’Aretusa Ovidio’, he is referring again to a part of Calliope’s song in *Metamorphoses* V (lines 572-641), where

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<sup>43</sup> Claudia Villa, ‘Minerva in Elicona e la nascita della poesia’, in *Sognare il Parnaso*, pp. 13-25.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Perseus ait oraque regis / ore Medusaeo silicem sine sanguine fecit. / Hactenus aurigenae comitem Tritonia fratri / se dedit; inde cava circumdata nube Seriphon / deserit [...] / [...] Thebas / virgineumque Heliconam petit’ (*Metamorphoses* V, 248-54). The full account of how Perseus was able to defeat the Gorgon is reported by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* IV, 769-803, where he also explains how the winged horse Pegasus was born from Medusa’s blood.

the goddess tells the story of the nymph Aretusa's transformation into a spring of water. Once again, this specific nucleus of myths is reused by Dante to make a strong metapoetic statement, which in this case involves the process of assimilation and integration of classical antecedents within the *Commedia*. The scholar goes on talking about the invocation to the Muses in *Purgatorio* I and the comparison between Matelda and Proserpina in *Purgatorio* XXVIII (which has been discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis), and then comes to the analysis of Beatrice's appearance as Minerva in *Purgatorio* XXX. In the description of this arrival – Villa notices – Dante insists on the idea of a veil, describing Beatrice as 'sovra candido vel cinta d'uliva' (line 31) and then again with a 'vel che le scendea di testa, / cerchiato de le fronde di Minerva' (lines 67-68). Exploiting the same semantic field of the 'velame' used in *Inferno* IX, Dante seems again to invite his readers to pay careful attention to this passage, to these images and to these words. For Villa, these verses show that what is on trial here is not only Dante's morality but also his poetry: 'La fronda di ulivo, distintivo della dea che fu giudice delle Muse nella gara fra Calliope e le Piche, può ben trattenere sul capo il velo di Beatrice, a sua volta giudice della poetica dantesca, secondo gli sferzanti rimproveri formulati nel loro ricongiungimento'.<sup>45</sup> In the course of the essay, the scholar remarks how Dante deliberately reworks the Ovidian episode of the poetic contest between the Muses and the Pierides (and the secondary myths that this passage contains) in order to blaze a precise trail of metapoetic reflection in the course of his poem. According to Villa, the presence of these myths in different parts of the *Commedia* points to different moments of poetic production: 'il terrore della sterilità creativa, l'impegno a competere senza imitare, la necessità di congiungere la tecnica e l'ingegno con il dono dell'ispirazione divina'.<sup>46</sup> This acute reading brings to light the presence of a precise poetic strategy, used by Dante to direct the readers' attention towards certain themes by repeatedly referring to the same mythological nucleus. What I propose is to insert this analysis in an even wider context, looking at Dante's reworking of this specific Ovidian passage not as a single case but as part of a broader web of references that revolves around the image of Parnassus-Helicon. This system of mythological allusions invites the readers of the *Commedia* to reflect not only on certain aspects of Dante's poetry but also on how they evolve over the course of the poem, in a constant dialogue with classical texts that is aimed at absorbing and integrating certain images, rather than overcoming them.

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<sup>45</sup> Claudia Villa, 'Minerva in Elicona e la nascita della poesia', p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

### 3.4 BEATRICE'S INEFFABILITY: PARNASSUS' 'CISTERNA' IN *PURGATORIO* XXXI

The reprimand of Beatrice 'proterva', admiral and judge of Dante's poetry, ends with a direct mention of Parnassus in *Purgatorio* XXXI. After admitting his guilt and experiencing such intense shame that he faints, at the end of canto XXXI Dante suddenly wakes up while Matelda is drawing him into the Lethe, baptising him with the waters of the Edenic river that erase the memory of sin. When he re-emerges, he is invited to look at Beatrice's eyes. 'L'anima mia gustava di quel cibo / che, saziando di sé, di sé asseta', says Dante at lines 128-29, reactivating that metaphoric parallel between thirst and knowledge that was already detected in the analysis of *Purgatorio* XXII and *Purgatorio* XXVIII. A few lines later, when Beatrice finally reveals her smile, Dante claims the impossibility of describing that vision by referring to the classical spring of poetic inspiration:

O isplendor di viva luce eterna,  
chi palido si fece sotto l'ombra  
sì di Parnaso, o bevve in sua cisterna,  
che non paresse aver la mente ingombra,  
tentando a render te qual tu paresti  
là dove armonizzando il ciel t'adombra,  
quando ne l'aere aperto ti solvesti? (*Purgatorio* XXXI, 139-45)

The mention of Parnassus at lines 140-41 brings back a series of themes that we have already identified in the analysis of the previous references to the mountain of poetry in the *Commedia*. First of all, the idea of the pallor of the poets that emerges at line 140 relies on the same concept of poetry as sacrifice that has been detected in *Purgatorio* XXIX ('se fami, / freddi o vigilie mai per voi sofferesi', lines 37-38).<sup>47</sup> Paratore noticed how this image brings us back to that passage from Persius's *choliambi* that was identified as Dante's potential point of reference for Matelda's words in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, 139-41.<sup>48</sup> At lines 1-6, Persius says,

Nec fonte labra prolui caballino

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<sup>47</sup> For the idea of the pallor of the poets (as a consequence of their dedication to poetry), see also Persius, *Satires* V, 62 ('At te nocturnis iuvat impallescere chartis') and Horace, *Epistles* I, 3 ('Pindarici fontis qui non expalluit haustus').

<sup>48</sup> See Paratore, 'Persio'.

nec in bicipite somniasse Parnaso  
 memini, ut repente sic poeta prodirem;  
 Heliconidasque pallidamque Pirenen  
 illis remitto quorum imagines lambunt  
 hederæ sequaces. (*Prol.* 1-6)

The pallor, which is metaphorically attributed to the spring Pirene in Persius' text, in *Purgatorio* XXXI, 140 becomes the result of the efforts of the poets who spend their time in the shadow of Parnassus' trees. Moreover, the classical idea of drinking from the springs of Parnassus in order to receive poetic inspiration, which opens Persius' *choliambi*, re-emerges in Dante's reference to Parnassus' 'cisterna' at line 141. For Paratore, Dante's 'bevve' can be directly connected with Persius' 'labra prolui'. Furthermore, the scholar takes into account the manuscript tradition of Persius' *Satiræ* and refers to a hypothesis (developed by Scevola Mariotti and Paratore himself) according to which the last line of the *choliambi* ('cantare credas Pegaseium nectar', line 14) also circulated with the verb 'potare' instead of 'cantare', especially in Eastern Europe.<sup>49</sup> In this version, the whole passage would end with the same image with which it started, namely that of the poet drinking the 'Pegaseium nectar' from Helicon's spring. Paratore suggests that this might have been the version of the *Satiræ* known by Dante, and that this last line could have been in the back of Dante's mind when he refers to Parnassus' springs. To support this idea, Paratore also mentions the first of Dante's *Eclogues*, where we read, at lines 28-32, 'Montibus Aoniis Mopsus, Meliboeë, quot annis / [...] se dedit et sacri nemoris perpalluit umbra. / Vatifidis prolutus aquis, et lacte canoro / viscera plena ferens'.<sup>50</sup> In Paratore's reading, it is not only Dante's *canorum lac* that recalls Persius' 'Pegaseium nectar', but the fact that the author of the *Eclogues* claims that his body is full of this poetic milk ('lacte canoro / viscera plena ferens') might also be connected to that idea of *potare* that we find in part of Persius' manuscript tradition.<sup>51</sup>

As regards the identification of this fountain, it is clear that when he refers to the 'fons caballinus' at line 1, Persius is talking about Hippocrene, the spring of Helicon generated by a kick from Pegasus' hoof. The same certainty cannot be applied to Dante's text, which does not give any additional information about Parnassus' 'cisterna'. In the previous part of this chapter, I discussed

<sup>49</sup> See Ettore Paratore, 'L'ultimo verso dei *choliambi* di Persio', in Paratore, *Biografia e poetica di Persio*, pp. 104-35.

<sup>50</sup> See Paratore, *Biografia e poetica di Persio*, p. 218.

<sup>51</sup> See Paratore, 'Persio'.

the potential confusion between Heliconian and Parnassian elements in the medieval imagination and it is possible that this confusion affected Dante as well. Medieval authors did not just fail in locating the classical springs of poetic inspiration on the right mountain (Hippocrene on Helicon, for example, and Castalia on Parnassus). The analysis of the commentary tradition on *Purgatorio* XXIX, 40 proved that they often conceived Helicon as a fountain itself. The comments on *Purgatorio* XXXI, 141 confirm this interpretation. When reading this passage, the early interpreters of the *Commedia* agreed in establishing a link between this unnamed ‘cisterna’ and poetic eloquence but mainly identified the ‘cisterna’ mentioned by Dante as Helicon.<sup>52</sup> It is only in the twentieth century that Dante commentators started associating Parnassus with Castalia, reconstructing the right topology of the mountain that Dante himself was probably unaware of.

As discussed above, the image of the poet drinking from Parnassus’ springs in order to receive poetic inspiration was recurrent in Dante’s imagination. We found the same idea in *Purgatorio* XXII when Dante introduces the name of Parnassus for the first time (‘tu prima m’inviaisti / verso Parnaso a ber ne le sue grotte’, lines 64-65), and then again in the invocation of *Purgatorio* XXIX, where the poet asks Helicon to pour its waters for him (‘or conven che Elicona per me versi’, line 40). This association between Parnassian waters and poetic inspiration, inherited from the classical tradition, seems to characterise Dante’s idea of the mountain of poetry. In comparison to other cantos, what is different in this case is that this time Parnassus’ waters are recalled by Dante to state an insufficiency, a gap between the vision and the word that was absent in *Purgatorio* XXII but also in *Purgatorio* XXIX, where the poet confidently invoked the Muses and Helicon’s waters with the precise intent of representing the Edenic procession with accuracy. Now something has changed and the poetic eloquence granted by Parnassus’ ‘cisterna’ would not be enough to represent Beatrice’s ‘santo riso’.<sup>53</sup>

In another very useful essay of 2009, Claudia Villa stresses the fact that *Purgatorio* XXX marks a turning point in Dante’s evolution, not only from a moral but also from a poetic point of view.<sup>54</sup> It is in *Purgatorio* XXX that Dante describes Beatrice’s arrival, translating the words pronounced by Dido in *Aeneid* IV, 23 (‘agnosco veteris vestigial flammae’) into his own language, stating once and for all the poetic authority of the vernacular and the final stage of a process of assimilation and recontextualization of his classical models (‘conosco i segni dell’antica fiamma’,

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example, the comments on this passage in the *Ottimo Commento* and in the commentaries of Pietro Alighieri and Benvenuto.

<sup>53</sup> *Purgatorio* XXXII, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Claudia Villa, ‘Corona, mitria, alloro e cappello’.

line 48). Still in *Purgatorio* XXX, Dante is named for the first time in the poem, acquiring a new, tangible and officially acknowledged poetic identity ('Dante, perché Virgilio se ne vada, / non pianger anco', lines 55-56). Given these premises, we may add that Dante's new baptism in the waters of Lethe in *Purgatorio* XXXI, initiates a new phase of Dante's journey but also a new phase of Dante's poetry. The differing deployments of Parnassian imagery in the poem (and in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, in particular) offer an index of a ratcheting up of poetic modes that is necessary to face increasing artistic challenges.

Dante's mention of Parnassus at the end of *Purgatorio* XXXI is the last of the second cantica and marks, for the first time, an insufficiency. It is not by chance that a very similar statement will be made by Dante in the heart of the third cantica, in *Paradiso* XXIII. At lines 46-48, Beatrice invites Dante to look at her now that his intellect is ready to contemplate her beauty. Here, in an attempt to describe what he saw, Dante claims,

Se mo sonasser tutte quelle lingue  
che Polimnïa con le suore fero  
del latte lor dolcissimo più pingue,  
per aiutarmi, al millesmo del vero  
non si verria, cantando il santo riso  
e quanto il santo aspetto facea mero (*Paradiso* XXIII, 55-60)

I briefly referred to this passage in the course of Chapter 1, discussing the image of the nursing Muses and the metaphor of milk as poetic eloquence that emerges in *Purgatorio* XXII. In that canto, however, the idea of the milk of poetry offered by the Muses was used with a positive connotation, in a periphrasis aimed at underlining the artistic talent of Homer, in particular, but also of the ancient poets in general ('quel Greco / che le Muse lattar più ch'altri mai', lines 101-02). Here, far beyond that crucial passage constituted by the Earthly Paradise, the same image of the nursing Muses is used to express an inadequacy. Just as happens in *Purgatorio* XXXI, drinking from the breasts of the Muses or from the springs of Parnassus does not provide the poet with the necessary artistic tools to picture the heavenly visions. Villa notices how both these declarations of insufficiency, in *Purgatorio* XXXI and *Paradiso* XXIII, are related to the representation of Beatrice's smile, and this is not surprising given the fact that it is in that smile that Dante condenses the idea

of Beatrice's beatitude and the expression of God's love.<sup>55</sup> To be even more precise, the 'santo riso' that Dante is not able to represent in *Purgatorio* XXXI, claiming the insufficiency of Parnassus' 'cisterna', is the first appearance of Beatrice's smile in the poem. The declaration of the ineffability of the same 'santo riso' in *Paradiso* XXIII, which involves the Muses' milk, comes when Dante is finally allowed to look at it without any filter.<sup>56</sup>

Villa states that 'attraverso le citazioni delle Muse, il lettore è chiamato a verificare come il poeta, dopo aver esplorato le strutture di *fabulae* e miti già consumati dall'imitazione, intenda riproporle [...] per ottenere, nuovo Omero allattato dalle Muse, l'alloro al quale aspira'.<sup>57</sup> This observation has the merit of recognising a specific metapoetic path drawn by Dante through the references to specific myths. However, I believe that this idea should be expanded to all the Parnassian images contained in the poem. It is not only with the references to the Muses that Dante designs and explains his own poetic development in the course of the three cantiche. The whole system of Parnassian myths and tropes that emerge in different parts of the *Commedia* marks the steps of a specific poetic path that has a turning point in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise. Looking closely at each of these references and putting them in conversation with one another (and with their context) provide us with a deeper understanding of Dante's poetic choices. In the garden of Eden, after he has been crowned and mitred by Virgil, after his poetic authority has been recognised by a new Minerva-Beatrice and after he has admitted his sins and bathed in the waters of Lethe, for the first time Dante uses a Parnassian image to declare an insufficiency. As I will discuss in the next chapter, this does not imply the rejection of Parnassian images in the following part of the poem. It just signals that the process of assimilation and integration of certain *topoi* in the Christian poetry of the *Commedia* is now complete and Dante must move to a different stage of his poetic path.

This idea of the insufficiency of Parnassian waters is amplified by two specific references to sapiential thirst that Dante makes before and after the passage from *Purgatorio* XXXI that I am analysing. As briefly mentioned above, right before admitting the impossibility of representing Beatrice's aspect, Dante is invited to look into her eyes which are reflecting the griffin, symbol of the two natures of Christ. At this point, Dante speaks to his readers and says,

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<sup>55</sup> Villa, 'Minerva e il riso di Beatrice', pp. 203-07.

<sup>56</sup> To make this connection even more explicit, Dante uses the same expression ('santo riso') both in *Purgatorio* XXXII, 5-6 ('così lo santo riso / a sé traéli') and in *Paradiso* XXIII, 59 ('cantando il santo riso').

<sup>57</sup> Villa, 'Corona, mitria, alloro e cappello', p. 186.

Pensa, lettor, s'io mi maravigliava,  
quando vedea la cosa in sé star queta,  
e ne l'idolo suo si trasmutava.

Mentre che piena di stupore e lieta  
l'anima mia gustava di quel cibo  
che, saziando di sé, di sé asseta,  
sé dimostrando di più alto tribo  
ne li atti, l'altre di fero avanti. (*Purgatorio* XXXI, 124-31)

Mixing together the semantic fields of food and water, at lines 128-29 Dante talks about this vision as a nutriment that quenches his thirst and makes him thirsty at the same time. Furthermore, at the beginning of *Purgatorio* XXXII, right after the declaration of ineffability that closes canto XXXI, he claims that, looking at Beatrice's face, his eyes were trying to 'disbramarsi la decenne sete' (line 2). In both cases, it is clear that the thirst Dante is referring to is a synonym for Christian knowledge, mediated by Beatrice's eyes and smile. Perhaps it is not accidental that the passage that states the insufficiency of the classical waters of poetic inspiration is placed by Dante between these two references to sapiential thirst. In Chapter 1, I noticed how the reference to the springs that pour from Parnassus' 'grotte' (*Purgatorio* XXII, 65) appears in a diptych of cantos characterised by the ongoing motif of sapiential thirst. In Chapter 2, I observed how the same association can be detected in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, when Matelda, willing to quench Dante's thirst ('avvega ch'assai possa esser sazia / la sete tua', lines 134-35), adds her 'corollario' stating the relationship between the Earthly Paradise and the dreams of the ancient poets on Mount Parnassus. Now, in line with the observations made so far, we can register a variation in the metaphorical relationship between thirst for knowledge and Parnassian waters. The reference to Parnassus' spring is not offered here as a satisfaction of Dante's intellectual curiosity. We are now entering the last part of the poem in which the author of the *Commedia* will face completely new cognitive and artistic challenges that he has slowly been prepared for in the course of the first and especially second cantiche. At this point, there is a shift in Dante's poetry which is reflected in how he exploits Parnassian imagery. An accurate reading of these references, of how they interact with one another and with the other elements of Dante's narrative can tell us more about this poetic evolution and add some elements to this metapoetic reflection that would otherwise be lost or remain implicit.

Dante's reworking of the image and the function of Parnassian springs in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise is even more interesting if we take into account the major presence of the semantic

field of water in this section of the poem. To conclude this chapter on the reuse of some classical *topoi* connected to Parnassus' waters in the garden of Eden, I would like to offer some final observations on the subtle but persistent interconnections between Parnassian and Edenic waters in the last cantos of *Purgatorio*, reflecting on a relationship that has not been fully explored so far and suggesting, once again, a potential overlap between the Parnassian and Edenic landscapes that would also justify a conceptual proximity.

### 3.5 EDENIC RIVERS AND PARNASSIAN REMINISCENCES

When Dante starts walking into the garden of Eden in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, one of the first details which captures his attention and on which he lingers is the presence of an extremely clear stream of water, a 'fiumicello' compared to which 'tutte l'acque che son di qua più monde, / parrieno avere in sé mistura alcuna' (lines 25-33). When Matelda offers to satisfy some of Dante's curiosity about the Earthly Paradise later in the canto, he immediately asks for some clarification about this water: "L'acqua" diss'io "e 'l suon de la foresta / impugnan dentro a me novella fede' (lines 85-86).<sup>58</sup> The presence of water is one of the descriptive elements of the Earthly Paradise on which Dante most insists and which has raised much interest among readers and scholars for the originality of the two rivers that run through Dante's Eden, namely Lethe and Eunoe. If we look more closely at this group of cantos, however, we will see how the semantic field of water brings together Parnassian and Edenic landscapes, suggesting a conceptual interaction between these two dimensions that can enrich our understanding of Dante's Earthly Paradise. A fundamental prerequisite for the analysis of this connection is a reflection on the potential sources that Dante relied on when he imagined, in a completely innovative way, a garden of Eden crossed by only two rivers which were not even related to the biblical tradition.

As already shown in Chapter 2, Dante's representation of the garden of Eden relies on many different sources and constitutes a mixture of old and new elements, which contribute to creating a highly symbolic landscape with traditional as well as radically new features.<sup>59</sup> The element of water is one of the conventional characteristics of the classical *locus amoenus*, even when these

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<sup>58</sup> It is worth noting that both these elements, the water and the sound of the forest, can be discussed in terms of Parnassian imagery. On this, see the discussion on Martianus Capella's representation of Parnassus and the sound of its forest in Chapter 2.

<sup>59</sup> For a bibliography on the sources of Dante's Earthly Paradise, see Chapter 2, pp. 3-6.

places pertain to an otherworldly dimension, as in the case of the Elysium.<sup>60</sup> In the biblical tradition, the garden of Eden was washed by rivers as well. According to *Genesis*, four streams have their source in the Earthly Paradise and flow to the rest of the world: the Gihon (identified as the Nile), the Pishon (identified as the Ganges), the Tigris and the Euphrates.<sup>61</sup> All the medieval descriptions of the garden of Eden stick to this version, despite some differences concerning the paths and the interpretations of these streams of water. In this respect, Dante's depiction of the Earthly Paradise is quite different, since he reports the presence of only two rivers. When Dante the pilgrim asks for more details about the nature of these two streams in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, Matelda presents them as Lethe and Eunoe and describes their complementary functions:

Da questa parte con virtù discende  
che toglie altrui memoria del peccato;  
dall'altra, d'ogni ben fatto la rende;  
quinci Letè, così dall'altro lato  
Eunoe si chiama: e non adopra  
se quinci e quindi pria non è gustato;  
a tutti altri sapori esto è di sopra. (*Purgatorio* XXVIII, 127-33)

This particular configuration of Dante's Earthly Paradise is completely new. First of all, the number of the rivers contradicts the biblical description of Eden and, therefore, the medieval representations of this place. Dante himself seems to draw the reader's attention to this personal choice by recalling the text of the Bible in *Purgatorio* XXXIII, when he compares his Edenic rivers to the Tigris and Euphrates, thus underlining the similarity but also the difference between his account of the Earthly Paradise and the biblical one:<sup>62</sup>

Dinanzi ad esse Eufràtes e Tigri  
veder mi parve uscir d'una fontana  
e, quasi amici, dipartirsi pigri. (*Purgatorio* XXXIII, 112-14)

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<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Virgil's account of the Elysian Fields (*Aeneid* VI, 703-05).

<sup>61</sup> *Genesis* 2, 10-14.

<sup>62</sup> On this comparison, see Saverio Bellomo, 'Canto XXXIII', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*, II. *Purgatorio* (2001), 503-15.

Secondly, the function of these two streams of water and their connection with memory cannot be related to the biblical tradition.

Many hypotheses have been made about the genesis of these two rivers. First of all, it is worth noting that this idea of the twin rivers is quite ancient and dates back to the beginning of Western literature, since it can already be found in Homer's *Odyssey* during the famous description of Alcinoos' garden in book VII (lines 129-31). At the beginning of the twentieth century, some scholars have also pointed out the analogy between Dante's depiction of the Edenic streams and an ancient inscription on the so-called Petelia tablet, which dates back to 300-200 BC.<sup>63</sup> This orphic tablet, unearthed in southern Italy and currently housed in the British Museum of London, describes two otherworldly streams and forbids the souls of the dead to drink from the one on the left (probably the Lethe), inviting them to go directly to the other one, which flows from the pond of Mnemosyne (the memory). It is unlikely that Dante had direct knowledge of this orphic tradition and this is why this line of inquiry has never received much attention among scholars. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the idea of two streams, somehow connected with the concept of memory, dates back to ancient times and is much older than the text of the *Commedia*.

We can find traces of this idea in later centuries as well and in different cultures. In his study on the relationship between Dante and Muslim texts, for example, Miguel Asín Palacios suggested a potential connection between Dante's Edenic rivers and the Muslim afterworld.<sup>64</sup> According to a Muslim legend, at the entrance of Muhammed's Paradise are two streams, in which the souls should dive and from which they should drink in order to cleanse themselves of hatred and become pure. Many scholars, who are quite skeptical about Dante's relationship with the Muslim tradition, have underlined the fact that these Islamic rivers do not originate from the same spring and have a different function from that of Dante's Lethe and Eunoe.<sup>65</sup> Once again, we do not have enough evidence to establish a direct relationship between Dante's Earthly Paradise and

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<sup>63</sup> Jane E. Harrison, 'Dante's Eunoë and an Orphic Tablet', *The Classical Review*, 17, 1 (1903), 58; John A. Stewart, 'The source of Dante's Eunoë', *Classical Review*, 17, 2 (1903), 117-18.

<sup>64</sup> See Miguel Asín Palacios, *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, trans. by Harold Sunderland (London-New York: Routledge, 2008 (first publ. as *La escatología musulmana en 'La Divina Comedia'*, seguida de la Historia y crítica de una polémica (Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura, 1943), pp. 125-27. For the relationship between Dante's *Commedia* and the Islamic afterworld, see also Maria Corti, 'La *Commedia* di Dante e l'oltretomba islamico', *L'Alighieri*, 36 (1995), 7-19.

<sup>65</sup> This difference was already clear for Nardi. See Bruno Nardi, 'Pretese fonti della *Divina Commedia*', in Bruno Nardi, *Dal Convivio alla Commedia. Sei saggi danteschi* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1992), pp. 360-62.

this specific Islamic legend. The analogy of these two descriptions, however, is useful to prove the persistence of the image of the twin streams in different times and cultures, especially in connection with the concept of memory and the representation of the afterworld.

Isidore of Seville testifies that this tradition is still alive in Western medieval culture, when he describes two existing springs in the region of Boeotia that have the power to restore and erase memory. In the section of his *Etymologiarum libri* that discusses ‘de diversitate aquarum’, he claims, ‘In Beotia duo fontes; alter memoriam, alter oblivionem fiant’.<sup>66</sup> It is therefore likely that Dante’s idea of Lethe and Eunoe was influenced by a multiplicity of different sources, rather than a single text or a specific origin.

As regards the representation and the function of the single rivers, it is evident that Dante borrows the Lethe from the classical tradition. Lethe was the infernal river of oblivion, connected – since Plato’s time – with the idea of the metempsychosis. The souls who were about to come back to earth drank from the Lethe to forget their previous life and Dante could have found many references to this river in the works of Latin *auctores*.<sup>67</sup> The function of Dante’s Lethe is different, since in Dante’s Eden the river does not have the power to erase the memory of a previous life but only the memory of sins. It is connected with the idea of purification rather than reincarnation. Despite the differences, however, it is quite easy to reconstruct Dante’s sources and identify his reworking of previous material. The interpretation of the river Eunoe is more complicated, since it appears to be Dante’s invention. It is common opinion among scholars that Dante created this name on the basis of medieval glossaries, with the Greek words εὖ (good) e νοῦς (mind, or memory).<sup>68</sup> The function of this second river is to restore the memory of good actions, thus creating a perfect complementarity between Lethe and Eunoe.

What is interesting is that, in order to explain the origin of Dante’s Eunoe, some commentators of the *Commedia* (in ancient and contemporary times) refer to an instance of mythological imagery connected with Parnassus, proposing some interpretations that, despite constituting a minority, have the merit of offering a different perspective on these cantos and highlighting that relationship between Parnassian and Edenic imagery that I seek to map in these

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<sup>66</sup> *Etymologiarum libri*, XIII, XIII, 3. For the idea of the two streams, Isidore relies on Plinius: ‘In Boeotia ad Trophonium deum iuxta flumen Hercynnum e duobus fontibus alter memoriam, alter oblivionem adfert, inde nominibus inventis’ (*Historia Naturalis* XXXI, 15).

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Virgil, *Aeneid* VI, 704-07 and Statius, *Thebaid* I, 296-98.

<sup>68</sup> See also the word ‘protonoe’ in *Convivio* II, III, 11, formed with the same mechanisms, with the meaning of ‘Prima Mente’.

chapters. In the first version of his commentary, Pietro Alighieri reads the word 'Eunoe' as a reference to the classical 'fons Aonius'. Commenting on *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 127-35, he states,

Vel secundum hunc auctorem, qui solum tres fluvios ponit in fontem; fons erit prudentia, Aonius fluvius; Euphrates et Tigris aliae tres. Et hoc est quod poetae figurant in Helicon montanea esse dictum Aonem, et de eo poetae perfecti bibere finguntur, scilicet gustare prudentiam, qua gustata omnium bonorum, quae sunt meritoria, memoriam accipiunt.<sup>69</sup>

In classical literature, 'Aonia' was an alternative name for Boeotia, the region of central Greece where Helicon was located. This is the reason why the adjective 'aonius' was used to identify something related to the Muses or to poetry in general. 'Aonius' was the mount where the Muses reside and 'Aonius' was the spring of poetic inspiration which poured from that mountain and was sacred to the nine sisters.<sup>70</sup> In Pietro's commentary, the idea that the 'fons Aonius' was located on Helicon automatically implied a connection with Parnassus as well, since, as mentioned above, Helicon was often considered a part of Parnassus in medieval mythography.<sup>71</sup> In this passage of his commentary, Pietro clearly gets confused about the Tigris and Euphrates, which are mentioned by Dante as terms of comparison in *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 112-14, but are not actually present in his depiction of Eden. However, the connection that he establishes between Eunoe and the 'Aonem' gives us a new and original perspective on Dante's representation of the Earthly Paradise. In the

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<sup>69</sup> See also the comment on lines 112-14: 'Isidorus vero dicit quod in hoc Paradiso deliciarum est fons, a quo manant haec quatuor flumina, scilicet, Phison circumiens Indiam, quod dicitur etiam Ganges a Gangero rege. Item Gehon circumiens Aethyopiam, quod etiam dicitur Nilus, idest hiatus Terrae. Aliud Tigris, a tigri animali dictum, eo quod velox; aliud Euphrates. Et licet ista flumina sint et videantur ibi, tamen sub figura accipi possunt, scilicet sic: quod fons iste Aonius pro prudentiae virtute accipiatur, a qua prudentia omnes aliae virtutes cardinales ut a fonte manant. Nam verus, prudens, justus, et fortis et temperatus est. Sic igitur Nilus a dicto Aone manans justitiam figurat: Tigris et Euphrates temperantiam, quae una est in principio, ut Tigris et Euphrates, et postea etiam duplicatur in temperantiam animi et corporis; Ganges fortitudinem'.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Virgil, *Georg.* III, 11; Ovid, *Fast.* III, 456.

<sup>71</sup> In his comment on *Paradiso* I, 16-18, Pietro states that the 'fons Aoniis' is on Helicon, one of Parnassus' peaks: 'Nam in dicto Helicone jugo labitur fons Aoniis musis consecrates'. In the comment on *Purgatorio* XXXI, 139-45, he identifies Parnassus' 'cisterna' as 'Aonio fonte': 'Quam pulcritudinem, si omnes poetae, qui plus fuerunt in Parnaso, vel bibissent plus in ejus Aonio fonte, non possent disserere quomodo fuerit in pulcritudine et dulcedine ineffabiliter per eum degustata'.

third version of his commentary, Pietro explicitly connects the river Eunoe with Parnassus: ‘sed etiam debet trahi ad flumen Eunoe fontis Parnasi, inducens memoriam homini bonarum omnium eius actionum preteritarum’.<sup>72</sup> Over recent years, this hypothesis has been supported by Saverio Bellomo, in an analysis of *Purgatorio* XXXIII aimed at stressing the metapoetic issues raised by Dante in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise.<sup>73</sup> Bellomo underlines the fact that, if Pietro’s reading is valid, Lethe and Eunoe would both find their origin in classical imagery and Dante’s construction of the landscape of the Earthly Paradise would be perfectly consistent, with the two rivers both borrowed from classical literature. Moreover, Bellomo seems to suggest a potential relationship between the ‘fons Aonius’ and the twin springs of memory and oblivion mentioned by Isidore of Seville in the passage of the *Etymologiarum libri* quoted above, since they are all located in the region of Boeotia. While it would be difficult to establish with certainty that Dante’s Edenic rivers are directly related to the springs mentioned by Isidore, it is nonetheless important to note that according to medieval mythography, the rivers of memory and of poetic inspiration had a geographical connection that would have made it easier to imagine a conceptual proximity.

The interpretation of the river Eunoe as related to the *Aonius fons* remains quite isolated in the landscape of Dante’s exegesis. However, the fact that a medieval interpreter of Dante could establish a connection between the river Eunoe and the Parnassian springs of poetic inspiration gives us an idea of the strong presence of metapoetic reflections and Parnassian imagery in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise. In Pietro Alighieri’s reading of the *Commedia*, a juxtaposition of Edenic and Parnassian elements would have made perfect sense. Following these suggestions, I would like to highlight the fact that attention to the language of the cantos of the Earthly Paradise – and analysis of the ancient commentary tradition on the *Commedia* – show some additional points of contact between Dante’s Earthly Paradise and Parnassus, which could expand Bellomo’s (and Pietro Alighieri’s) metapoetic reading of this passage of *Purgatorio*.

First of all it is worth noting that, in this last section of the second cantica, the references to the Edenic rivers and to the springs of Parnassus are closely intertwined. In these cantos, Dante seems to insist on the semantic field of water. Everything happens along the shores of the two Edenic rivers. As already mentioned, when Dante enters the garden of Eden in *Purgatorio* XXVIII and starts describing this ‘selva antica’, the first river that he encounters (which will later be named as Lethe by Matelda) is one of the main features of his depiction (lines 22-33). A few lines later,

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<sup>72</sup> On *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 85-145.

<sup>73</sup> Bellomo, ‘Canto XXXIII’.

Dante sees Matelda ‘di là dal fiumicello’ (line 35) and repeatedly underlines the fact that they are separated by the river during their dialogue (see lines 61-63 and 70-75). The water is clearly one of the elements that captures Dante’s attention in the wood of the Earthly Paradise. We already saw how, at line 85, he admits to Matelda that he wants to know more about this ‘acqua’<sup>74</sup> and that at lines 121-33 she replies by explaining the nature of the two rivers, Lethe and Eunoe. It is right after this description that Matelda says that she is keen to further satisfy Dante’s thirst (‘avvegna ch’assai possa esser sazia / la sete tua’, lines 134-35) and mentions Parnassus for the first time, stating that ancient poets dreamt about the Earthly Paradise on the mountain of poetry (lines 139-41). The following canto, *Purgatorio* XXIX, opens with a reference to the nymphs and with Matelda and Dante’s movements along the shores of Lethe (‘allor si mosse contra ’l fiume, andando su per la riva’, lines 7-8).<sup>75</sup> Dante refers to this setting again at lines 67-72 (‘l’acqua imprendëa dal sinistro fianco / [...] / quand’io da la mia riva ebbi tal posta, / che solo il fiume mi facea distante’) and at lines 88-89 (‘a rimpetto di me da l’altra sponda’). It is in this context, right before the beginning of the Edenic procession, that Dante invokes the Muses and asks Helicon to pour forth its waters for him (lines 37-42). Finally, as we saw in the previous section of this chapter, the last reference to Parnassus in *Purgatorio* is once again connected with water. Towards the end of canto XXXI, which started with Beatrice’s reference to the ‘fiume sacro’ (line 1) and to the waters that erase ‘le memorie triste’ (lines 11-12), Dante is eventually allowed to dive and drink from Lethe’s waters (‘tratto m’avea nel fiume infin la gola, / [...] / ove convene ch’io l’acqua inghiottissi’, lines 94-105).<sup>76</sup> And it is right after this fundamental ritual that we find the reference to Parnassus’ ‘cisterna’ and to the classical image of the poet drinking from the spring of poetic inspiration (lines 139-45).<sup>77</sup> The

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<sup>74</sup> The other element that surprises Dante is the ‘suon de la foresta’ (line 85).

<sup>75</sup> Dante refers to this setting again at lines 67-72 and 88-89.

<sup>76</sup> In the previous canto, we still find a couple of references to Lethe (‘li occhi mi cadder giù nel chiaro fonte’, *Purgatorio* XXX, 76; ‘se Letè si passasse a tal vivanda’, *Purgatorio* XXX, 143), even if there is no mention of Parnassus and its springs.

<sup>77</sup> A reference preceded, as mentioned above, by Dante’s allusion to ‘quel cibo / che, saziando di sé, di sé asseta’, lines 128-29). As regards the presence of water in the following cantos, we find the aforementioned reference to Dante’s ‘decenne sete’ in *Purgatorio* XXXII, 2, and then again a reference to Lethe at lines 82-84 (‘fu de’ miei passi lungo ’l fiume pria’). The element of water is again central in the second half of canto XXXIII, with the mention of the Tigris and Euphrates (lines 112-14), Dante’s confusion about the Eunoe (‘che acqua è questa’ lines 115-23), and the pilgrim’s final purification in the waters of the river of ‘good memory’ (lines 127-45). *Purgatorio* ends with the image of Dante re-emerging from the water (‘da la Santissima onda’) ready to ascend to heaven (‘puro e disposto a salire a le stelle’).

imagery of Parnassus and its springs therefore appears intertwined with Dante's description of his process of atonement in the rivers of the Earthly Paradise.

This subtle but persistent interconnection would explain why it was so easy for Pietro Alighieri to think about a potential overlap between the river Eunoe and the *fons Aonius*. On this basis, this association could be justified not only by the similarity between the words 'Eunoe' and 'Aonius' – as Bellomo states – but also by the fact that the references to these two different kinds of water are repeatedly put in relation to one another in the last cantos of *Purgatorio* and that, talking about water, Dante switches from Edenic to Parnassian springs with great ease.

I believe that Pietro Alighieri's interpretation of the river Eunoe as *fons Aonius* is not entirely convincing in order to explain Dante's naming of this new river. The presence of a similar word in the *Convivio* ('protonoe', with the meaning of 'Prima Mente'), formed with the same mechanism that Dante could have used to invent the name of Eunoe, makes it easier to think about medieval glossaries as the main source for Dante's nomenclature of the Edenic river. However, I believe that these 'mistakes' point to the fact that there is an implicit relationship between Edenic and Parnassian elements in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise that has not been fully disclosed and investigated by Dante scholars so far.

To further enlarge this picture and offer a better understanding of the potential interactions between Parnassian and Edenic waters, we may take into account another medieval commentary which show some confusion about the characteristics of Parnassus's rivers but help us reconstruct a common medieval imagery in which different elements might have appeared merged together and which could have been familiar to Dante as well. In the glosses to *Inferno* IX that we find in the Ottimo Commento, Helicon is interpreted as the mountain of the Muses:

E come dice di sopra, Teseo prese il regno di Medussa, tagliole la testa, sparole il ventre,  
del cui sangue nacque il Pegaso, cioè il cavallo con l'alie, lo quale corendo a[l] monte  
Elicona cavòe la terra, e produsse fuori una fontana, dove beono le Muse, e li Poeti.  
(Ottimo Commento, on *Inferno* IX, 16-42)<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> A few lines later, the author of the commentary adds: 'Il Pegaso corre al monte della sapienza, cioè Elicona, e producene fuori uno rivo, cioè le scienze che sono a contentare il disiderio di coloro, che vogliono sapere, e materia di scritture'.

The author confirms this idea in his commentary on *Purgatorio* XXII, 104-105, when he claims that Helicon is one of Parnassus' peaks (together with Cithaeron): 'Questi due giochi da due fratelli Cytheron ed Helicon furono appellati'. On this occasion, however, he adds that the second peak of the mountain (Helicon) also gives its name to a spring and that these waters have the specific function of restoring memory: 'e da questo Helicon è nominata una fonte, ch'è in su quel monte, chiamata Elicona, ristoratrice della memoria'.<sup>79</sup> The Ottimo's interpretation of this passage, therefore, suggests a connection between Helicon and memory which gives the classical fountain (a *fons Aonijs* sacred to poets) a very similar function to the river Eunoe. The *Ottimo Commento* is the only commentary which attributes this power to Helicon's waters. This interpretation of Helicon is probably related to the passage from Isidore's *Etymologiarum libri* quoted above, where he refers to the two springs of memory located in Boeotia, which was the region of Greece where Helicon was located too. This confusion, however, points once again to the fact that some features of Dante's Earthly Paradise – the rivers, in this case – tended to overlap with a Parnassian imagery, and that Dante continuous references to the Edenic rivers and the springs of poetic inspiration in the course of the Earthly Paradise could justify similar interpretations.

Apart from these revealing mistakes in the interpretive tradition on the *Commedia*, the insistence on the semantic field of water allows us to detect a point of contact between these two dimensions and to see the references to Parnassus' springs as part of that process of purification that Dante needs to undertake on the top of the mountain of Purgatory. This lexical proximity between Edenic and Parnassian rivers suggests, once again, that the evolution that takes place in the Earthly Paradise not only regards Dante's soul, but his poetry as well. As happens for the relationship between Parnassian imagery and the prophetic power of poetry that I investigated in Chapter 2, the analysis of Dante's reuse of the *topoi* connected to Parnassian waters in the Earthly Paradise points us to a metapoetic discourse that started in *Purgatorio* XXII and is aimed at shaping Dante's poetic identity.

Investigation into the references to Parnassian waters helps us recognise the different stages of Dante's poetic development, reflected in the different ways in which he approaches and reuses the classical image of the poet drinking from the springs of poetic inspiration in the course of the poem. The fact that from *Purgatorio* XXII to the cantos of the Earthly Paradise Dante seems to weave together the motif of poetic inspiration and that of sapiential thirst, also leads us to consider

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<sup>79</sup> This idea is confirmed in the commentary on *Purgatorio* XXXI, 140-41: 'O bevve in sua cisterna ec. Cioè nella fonte Elicona'.

this progressive appropriation and re-elaboration of classical images as a fundamental part of Dante's path to Paradise.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, in *Paradiso* Dante will be able to quench his thirst with a completely different kind of water, which pours directly from the fountain of God. He will be able to drink with his own eyes ('bevve la gronda / de le palpebre mie', *Paradiso* XXX, 88-89) the light of the Empyrean. The development of the motif of water and thirst as related to Dante's desire for knowledge, however, must also go through the re-elaboration of certain classical images connected with Parnassus, poetic inspiration and the classical representation of wisdom. The recontextualisation, modification and final assimilation of these Parnassian images happen in the garden of Eden, right before the beginning of the third cantica. This does not mean that Parnassian imagery will disappear over the course of *Paradiso*. On the contrary, Dante's 'ultimo lavoro' starts with a series of Parnassian references that will complete the observations made so far on Dante's reworking of myths and figures connected to the classical mountain of poetry. The next chapter will show how this mythological unit finds its place in *Paradiso*, fostering an idea of integration rather than rejection and signaling the arrival point of a poetic discourse that is fully developed by Dante in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise. Ancient and modern readings of the last section of *Purgatorio* have already underlined the metapoetic value of this passage of the poem. Some fundamental aspects of this metapoetic discourse, however, are closely related to the coherent system of Parnassian allusions that this dissertation aims to identify and analyse in order to offer new perspectives on Dante's re-elaboration of classical texts and on his construction of the Earthly Paradise.

The observations made in the course of this chapter may suggest an interesting series of equations. We may ask ourselves if it is also possible to think about Dante's journey up the mountain of Purgatory and to the garden of Eden as a process of poetic growth aimed at reaching the peak of a new Parnassus. In these last cantos of *Purgatorio*, Dante seems to present himself as the author of a new moral poetry, who needs the approval of a new Minerva in order to write a poem that will be able to reshape and rebuild human society. In this comparison, Dante's bathing in and drinking from the waters of Lethe and Eunoe may also be read as the image of a poet seeking a new kind of poetic inspiration and validation from a new *fons Aonijs*. In John of Garland's allegorising interpretation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the spring of water generated by the kick from Pegasus' hoof is described as the fountain which can grant poets immortal fame: 'Iste poetarum

fons est quia poetarum fama perhennis / illos perpetuum nomen habere facit'.<sup>80</sup> In the course of the *Commedia*, Dante will make clear that true immortality (both from a spiritual and an artistic point of view) must come from a different kind of fountain. However, his aspiration for poetic glory as the author of a 'sacrato poema' also passes through the re-elaboration and repositioning of the classical *topoi* connected with Parnassus. Over recent years, increasing attention has been paid to Dante's 'syncretic penchant'<sup>81</sup> and scholars have highlighted his tendency to mix different sources on a literary, philosophical and theological level.<sup>82</sup> The potential relationship between the classical representation of Parnassus and the garden of Eden, with all the intersections between poetic inspiration, knowledge and wisdom, could be read as part of the harmonising attitude that characterises Dante's approach to his sources, both pagan and Christian.

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<sup>80</sup> *Integumenta Ovidii* V, 9-10.

<sup>81</sup> See Teodolinda Barolini, 'Medieval Multiculturalism and Dante's Theology of Hell', in Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 102-21 (p. 104).

<sup>82</sup> On Dante's syncretism, see Robert Hollander, 'Dante's *Paradiso* as Philosophical Poetry', *Italica*, 86, 4 (2009), 571-82; Barolini, 'Medieval Multiculturalism'; Simon Gilson, 'Sincretismo e scolastica in Dante', *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, 90, 1 (2015), 317-39.

## CHAPTER 4

### TOWARDS THE POETRY OF *PARADISO*: APOLLO AND THE TWO PEAKS OF PARNASSUS

The previous chapters examined the presence of Parnassian references in *Purgatorio* XXII and in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, showing how Dante reuses this specific mythological imagery in the last section of the second cantica. This analysis revealed the presence of a consistent system of Parnassian images that channel some fundamental reflections on the role of Dante's poetry, defined through the dialogue with (and the recontextualisation of) pagan literature. Such a coherent web of references to specific myths and *topoi*, which are so closely intertwined with metapoetic considerations, cannot be accidental. The presence of Parnassian images seems to mark the salient points of Dante's definition of his own artistic project. This investigation also showed how the reflection on poetry suggested and guided by Parnassian tropes happens at a very precise juncture of the poem, namely the section of the Earthly Paradise, which marks the passage between an earthly and a heavenly dimension and demands Dante's evolution not only from a spiritual but also from a poetic point of view.

In this last chapter, I will analyse the last direct reference to Parnassus in the poem, which appears at the beginning of the third cantica in the invocation to Apollo that opens the first canto of *Paradiso*. After examining the idea of Parnassus that emerges from this passage and offering some observations on the interpretive problems connected with the mountain of poetry in these tercets, I will reflect on the figure of Apollo – the Parnassian deity par excellence – in the medieval imagination and in Dante's *Commedia*, showing the potential role of this figure in the transitional space of *Paradiso* I. The final aim of this analysis is to confirm the central importance of the cantos of the Earthly Paradise for Dante's reworking of Parnassian images, for the repositioning of pagan literature inside the 'sacrato poema' and – consequently – for the development of Dante's own poetry. After this turning point, myths and figures connected to Parnassus find their place in *Paradiso*, signaling that Dante has reached his full artistic maturity.

#### 4.1. 'A L'ULTIMO LAVORO': THE OPENING INVOCATION OF *PARADISO*

Dante's *Paradiso* opens under the poetic patronage of Apollo. In the first lines of *Paradiso* I, Dante states the subject of the third cantica, claiming that 'quant'io del regno santo / ne la mia mente

potei far tesoro, / sarà ora materia del mio canto' (lines 10-12), and underlining the poetic difficulties entailed in the representation of the realm of God ('e vidi cose che ridire / né sa né può chi di là sù discende', lines 5-6). It is to face this new challenge of representation that Dante asks for Apollo's help, in the course of a long invocation (the longest invocation of the poem) which occupies eight tercets of the canto and contains, at line 16, the last direct reference to Parnassus in the poem:

O buon Apollo, a l'ultimo lavoro  
fammi del tuo valor sì fatto vaso,  
come dimandi a dar l'amato alloro.

Infino a qui l'un giogo di Parnaso  
assai mi fu; ma or con amendue  
m'è uopo intrar ne l'aringo rimaso.

Entra nel petto mio, e spira tue  
sì come quando Marsia traesti  
de la vagina de le membra sue.

O divina virtù, se mi ti presti  
tanto che l'ombra del beato regno  
segnata nel mio capo io manifesti,  
vedra'mi al piè del tuo diletto legno  
venire, e coronarmi de le foglie  
che la materia e tu mi farai degno.

Sì rade volte, padre, se ne coglie  
per trionfare o cesare o poeta,  
colpa e vergogna de l'umane voglie,  
che parturir letizia in su la lieta  
delfica deità dovria la fronda  
peneia, quando alcun di sé asseta.

Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda:  
forse di retro a me con miglior voci  
si pregherà perché Cirra risponda. (*Paradiso* I, 13-36)

In the course of this long passage, Dante invokes the support of the ‘buon Apollo’, claiming that the increasing poetic difficulty of representing the realm of God now requires not just one, but both the peaks of Parnassus. Dante asks the Delphic god to inspire him and make him worthy of the laurel, the plant sacred to Apollo and therefore symbol of poetic glory. The bibliography on this first invocation of *Paradiso* is extensive, since there are many important aspects of this passage that are worthy of scholars’ attention, from the mythological episodes to which Dante refers, to the biblical references contained in these tercets, to the interpretation of the figure of Apollo himself. It will not be possible to offer an in-depth analysis of all these topics in the course of this chapter. For the purposes of this research, I will limit myself to discussing the features of this invocation that are most significant for understanding Dante’s use of Parnassian imagery in *Paradiso*, pointing to the relevant bibliography for those aspects of the invocation that I will not be able to analyse with the necessary attention on this occasion.<sup>1</sup>

First of all, in terms of contextualisation, it is worth remembering that this is the fifth invocation of the *Commedia* and the first that is not addressed to the Muses. As already mentioned in the previous chapters, both *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* have two invocations (one in the opening of the cantica and one right before its final section), which all involve the nine goddesses of art and poetry. *Paradiso* significantly breaks this symmetry, with five invocations addressed to different entities: Apollo in *Paradiso* I, the ‘diva Pegasëa’ (once again, one of the Muses) in *Paradiso* XVIII,<sup>2</sup> the ‘glorioso stelle’ of the constellation of Gemini in *Paradiso* XXII,<sup>3</sup> the ‘isplendor di Dio’ in

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<sup>1</sup> For a general reading of this invocation in the context of the whole canto, see Ettore Paratore ‘Il canto I del *Paradiso*’, *Nuove letture dantesche*, v (1972), pp. 255-284; Petrocchi, ‘Il canto I del *Paradiso*’; Sarteschi, ‘Canto I’; Bodo Guthmüller, “‘Trasumanar significar per verba/ non si poria’”. Sul I canto del *Paradiso*’, *L’Alighieri. Rassegna dantesca*, 48, (2007), 107-120; Hollander, ‘Il prologo alla terza cantica’; Ledda, ‘Invocazioni e preghiere’, pp. 134-37 (for an analysis of this *exordium*, in relation to the *topoi* connected with ineffability, see also Giuseppe Ledda, ‘Visione, memoria e scrittura nel *Paradiso*’, in Ledda, ‘La guerra della lingua’, pp. 243-59); Ariani, ‘Canto I’; Zygmunt G. Barański, ‘*Paradiso* I’, in *Lectura Dantis Bononiensis*, ed. by Emilio Pasquini and Carlo Galli, 11 vols. (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2011-2021), IX (2020), 145-183. Further bibliography on some specific aspects of this invocation will be provided in the course of the chapter.

<sup>2</sup> *Paradiso* XVIII, 82-87: ‘O diva Pegasëa che li ’ngegni / fai gloriosi e rendili longevi, / ed essi teco le cittadi è ’ regni, / illustrami di te, sì ch’io rilevi / le lor figure com’io l’ho concette: / paia tua possa in questi versi brevi!’.

<sup>3</sup> *Paradiso* XXII, 112-23: ‘O gloriose stelle, o lume pregno / di gran virtù, dal quale io riconosco / tutto, qual che sia, il mio ingengo, / con voi nasceva e s’ascondeva vosco / quelli ch’è padre d’ogne mortal vita, / quand’io senti’ di prima l’aere tosco; / e poi, quando mi fu grazia largita / d’entrar ne l’alta rota che vi gira, / la vostra region mi fu sortita. / A voi divotamente ora sospira / l’anima mia, per acquistar virtute / al passo forte che a sé la tira’.

*Paradiso* XXX,<sup>4</sup> and finally the ‘somma luce’ in *Paradiso* XXXIII, which Dante invokes before describing his vision of God.<sup>5</sup> Even without an in-depth examination of these passages and of the system of the invocations in general, this brief overview shows that something has changed in the transition between the second and the third cantica. The entities that supported Dante’s poetry in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* are no longer sufficient to face the increasing poetic challenges of the poet, who now needs to address different deities and, ultimately, the Christian god himself. The invocation to Apollo of *Paradiso* I, with its novelty in terms of length and content, clearly signals a turning point in Dante’s poetic path. As already observed, the cantos of the Earthly Paradise determine the end of a section of the poem and the beginning of a new one, both from a spiritual and from an artistic point of view. It is worth noting that, when Dante the author invokes Apollo at the beginning of the third cantica, the pilgrim and his guide Beatrice are still in the garden of Eden. The process of ‘trasumanar’, the proper passage between an earthly and a heavenly dimension, only happens between lines 58 and 81 when Dante, looking at Beatrice, is surrounded by a very intense light and suddenly finds himself in Heaven, feeling ‘qual si fé Glauco nel gustar de l’erba / che ’l fé consort in mar de li altri dei’ (lines 68-69).<sup>6</sup> The invocation to Apollo at the beginning of *Paradiso* I can therefore be considered as a key moment in that process of poetic evolution marked by the references to Parnassian imagery that takes place in the cantos of Eden and that this research aims to delineate and explain.

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<sup>4</sup> *Paradiso* XXX, 97-99: ‘O isplendor di Dio, per cu’io vidi / l’alto trïunfo del regno verace, / dammi virtù a dir com’io il vidi!’.

<sup>5</sup> *Paradiso* XXXIII, 67-75: ‘O somma luce che tanto ti levi / da’ concetti mortali, a la mia mente / ripresta un poco di quel che parevi, / e fa la lingua mia tanto possente, / ch’una favilla sol de la tua gloria / possa lasciare a la futura gente; / ché, per tornare alquanto a mia memoria / e per sonare un poco in questi versi, / più si conceperà di tua vittoria’. For a careful analysis of the invocations of the third cantica and of the meaning of their different distribution and content, see the studies of Robert Hollander on the invocations of the *Commedia* (Hollander, ‘The invocations of the *Commedia*’; Hollander, ‘Dante’s nine invocations revisited’) and the observations of Giuseppe Ledda on the prayers of *Paradiso* (Ledda, ‘Invocazioni e preghiere’). See also Manlio Pastore Stocchi, ‘Muse’, in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, III (1971), 1060.

<sup>6</sup> For some observations on Dante’s reuse of the Ovidian myth of Glaucus, see Brownlee, ‘Pauline Vision and Ovidian Speech in *Paradiso* I’; Guthmüller, “‘Trasumanar significar per verba/ non si poria’”; Leyla M. G. Livraghi, ‘*Raptus* e *deificatio* ovidiani nel sistema della *Commedia*’, in *Ortodossia ed eterodossia in Dante Alighieri*, pp. 691-709; Mario Paolo Tassone, ‘Ipotesi di voce per un repertorio dei miti nella *Commedia*: Glauco’, in *Tutto il lume de la sfera nostra*, pp. 165-175.

#### 4.2. 'INFINO A QUI L'UN GIOGO DI PARNASO / ASSAI MI FU': THE REPRESENTATION OF PARNASSUS IN *PARADISO* I

Before reflecting on the complex figure of Apollo and on his role in the poem, I will start the analysis of this passage from *Paradiso* I by offering some observations on Dante's depiction of the classical mountain of poetry at the beginning of the third cantica. The fact that the author of the *Commedia* refers to 'l'un giogo di Parnaso' at line 16, stating that in order to complete his poem 'or con amendue / m'è uopo intrar ne l'aringo rimaso' (lines 17-18), has puzzled Dante scholars for centuries and has been interpreted in many different ways. Dante does not mention this specific feature of Parnassus in *Purgatorio* but he is now referring to one of the main descriptive elements that has characterised the mountain of poetry since ancient times, namely its twin-peaked shape. In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid depicts Parnassus as a mountain which 'verticibus petit arduus astra duobus' and calls it 'biceps'.<sup>7</sup> Statius describes it as 'bivertex', and Lucan claims that it reaches the sky with 'gemino colle'.<sup>8</sup> The general thrust of Dante's statement is clear. In composing the most challenging cantica of his poem, Dante needs a superior source of inspiration (represented by Apollo), that was not necessary when he wrote *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. If we look at these verses in more detail, however, the first assertion of the tercet is not as clear as it seems. We understand that, in Dante's imagination, one of the two peaks of the mountain was inhabited by Apollo, to whom Dante is addressing his prayer. However, the author of the *Commedia* does not specify which deity occupies the other peak of the mountain, the one that is no longer sufficient in order to complete the poem. For the reader (or at least the modern reader) the literal meaning of this affirmation remains vague and still fuels scholarly debate.

The confusion around this tercet is rooted in the fact that the correct identification of the two peaks of Parnassus is not perfectly clear even in classical antiquity. As far as we know, there are no classical sources that specify the names of the two crests of the mountain and the potential differences between them. There is no doubt that Parnassus, just like the city of Delphi nearby, was associated with the cult of Apollo in classical mythology. Ovid says that Apollo was on Mount Parnassus when Cupid's arrow reached him and made him fall in love with Daphne (*Metamorphoses*

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<sup>7</sup> *Metamorphoses* I, 317; II, 221. The same adjective ('biceps') is used by Seneca (*Oedipus* 281) and Persius (*Satires*, *prol.*, 2).

<sup>8</sup> See Statius, *Thebaid* I, 628 (Statius also refers to the peaks of Parnassus with the plural form in *Thebaid* V, 532; 'cornua Parnasi'), and Lucan, *Pharsalia* V, 72.

I, 452-73).<sup>9</sup> The same association between this mountain and Apollo can be found in several other passages from Latin authors, such as Seneca or Statius,<sup>10</sup> and is inherited by medieval culture, as Dante's verses testify.

As regards the specific connection between Apollo and one of the two peaks of the mountain, the last lines of the opening invocation of *Paradiso* I, with the mention of 'Cirra', are clarifying:

Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda;  
forse di retro a me con miglior voci  
si pregherà perché Cirra risponda. (*Paradiso* I, 34-36)

In classical antiquity, the toponym Cyrrha originally designated a city near Parnassus and Delphi, which was sacred to Apollo and often mentioned in association with the prophetic talent of the god.<sup>11</sup> The adjective 'Cirrhaeus' was a common epithet used by Latin poets when referring to Apollo or to something that belonged to him. The 'Cirrhaeus pectus' recalled by Lucan or the expression 'Cirrhae pater' with which Statius names Apollo in the *Thebaid* are examples of this.<sup>12</sup>

What is relevant here is that the name of Cyrrha is occasionally evoked by Latin *auctores* in close connection with Parnassus, as happens in this passage of the *Thebaid*:

Si bene quid merui, si me de matre cadentem  
fovisti gremio et traiectione vulnere plantas  
firmasti, si stagna peti Cirrhaea bicorni  
interfusa iugo. (*Thebaid* I, 60-63)

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<sup>9</sup> See also *Metamorphoses* XI, 338-40.

<sup>10</sup> See Seneca, *Oedipus* 225-29 and *Agamemnon* 720-23, and Statius, *Thebaid* V, 531-33; VI, 357-59.

<sup>11</sup> The identification of Cyrrha with a city is already present in Strabo's *Geographia* (IX, 3, 3). On Dante's representation of Cyrrha, see also Adolfo Cecilia, 'Cirra' in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, II (1970), 25; Enzo Mandruzzato, 'Cirra, Nisa e i "due gioghi" danteschi', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 151 (1974), 72-76.

<sup>12</sup> For the 'Cirrhaeus pectus', see Lucan, *Pharsalia* V, 166. Lucan also refers to the 'Cirrhaea secreta' told by Apollo to his devotees (*Pharsalia* I, 64). Statius uses the expression 'Cirrhae pater' in *Thebaid* VII, 779 (but see also *Thebaid*, I 568, 641; III 455; VII 664). When analysing the occurrences of the name 'cirrha' or the adjective 'cirrhaeus' in classical texts, the identification of Cyrrha with a city or rather a region seems to be confirmed. Latin authors often write about caves, waters and fields that seems to be located there. See, for example, 'antra Cirrhaea' (*Pharsalia* V, 95), 'stagna Cirrhaea' (*Thebaid* I, 62), 'arva Cirrhaeae' (*Pharsalia* VI, 408), 'Cirrhaei campi' (*Thebaid* I, 568).

Here, Statius seems to imply that Cyrrha's lake ('stagna') is located between the two peaks of Parnassus. The same geographical relationship is present in a passage from Lucan's *Pharsalia*, which, as many scholars have pointed out, could have played an essential role in Dante's imagination.<sup>13</sup> It is worth quoting this passage in full, because it will be useful in the course of this chapter in order to understand Dante's invocation to Apollo and the definition of the two peaks of Parnassus:

Hesperio tantum quantum summotus eoo,  
cardine Parnasos gemino petit aethera colle,  
mons Phoebus Bromioque sacer, cui numine mixto  
Delphica Thebae referunt trieterica Bacchae.  
Hoc solum fluctu terras mergente cacumen  
eminuit pontoque fuit discrimen et astris.  
Tu quoque vix summam seductus ab aequore rupem  
extuleras unoque iugo, Parnasse, latebas.  
Ultor ibi expulsae, premeret cum viscera partus,  
matris adhuc rudibus Paeon Pythona sagittis  
explicuit, cum regna Themis tripodasque teneret.  
Ut vidit Paeon vastos telluris hiatus  
divinam spirare fidem ventosque loquaces  
exhalare solum, sacris se condidit antris  
incubuitque adyto: vates ibi factus Apollo. (*Pharsalia* V, 71-85)

In this passage, Lucan says that when the world was covered by water only the highest peak of Parnassus emerged from it, and Apollo chose to inhabit this sacred place and dedicate himself to

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Ettore Paratore, 'Il canto I del *Paradiso*', pp. 271-73. Lucan also mentions the 'scopulosa Cirrha' and the 'Parnasos iugo [...] desertus utroque' in *Pharsalia* III 172-73. However, here the two places seem to be connected but not completely identical. Lucan could possibly have made a sort of hendiadys between the two toponyms but, since he is making a list of places, it is hard to think that there is a complete identification.

prophecies.<sup>14</sup> Apollo is described as the god who knows the secrets of the universe ('aeterni secreta tenens mundoque futuri conscius', lines 89-90) but who nonetheless decided to descend to earth and live with men, sharing his knowledge. In the next section of this chapter, I will show how these characteristics of Apollo (his role as prophet and interpreter of the gods, as well as his combat against the snake Python, mentioned by Lucan at line 80), fostered the allegorical juxtaposition between him and Christ during the Middle Ages.

Lucan's verses seem to confirm the association between Cyrrha and Apollo. The Latin poet talks about 'sacris antris' to designate the place where Apollo chose to live (line 84) and a few lines later he mentions the 'antra Cirrhaea', probably referring to the same caves. Describing Apollo's refusal to predict the future, he adds: 'Muto Parnasos hiatus / conticuit pressitque deum / [...] seu, barbarica cum lampade Python / arsit, in immensas cineres abiere cavernas / et Phoebi tenere viam, seu sponte deorum / Cirrha silet' (lines 131-36). This and a few similar passages from classical texts probably led to the identification between Cyrrha and the crest of Parnassus inhabited by Apollo.<sup>15</sup> This identification still appears widespread during the Middle Ages. Enrico Proto, for example, recalled a passage from Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* to prove the strength of this connection in medieval culture ('Tandem fama nuntiante cognoscunt quod Phoebus gaudet Parnasia rupes, [...] tamen Cirrhaeos tunc recessus et sacrati specus loquacia antra conveniunt').<sup>16</sup> This connection is also confirmed by medieval encyclopaedic texts such as Isidore's

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<sup>14</sup> The episode that Lucan is referring to at the beginning of this passage is the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha, already mentioned and analysed in Chapter 2. There, I mainly examined the Ovidian account of the myth, showing potential overlaps between the biblical and the pagan deluge, between Deucalion and Noah (or, potentially, Deucalion and Dante), and between the classical image of Parnassus and the Christian idea of the Earthly Paradise as located on the highest mountain on earth (or to use Dante's words, 'nel monte che si leva più da l'onda', *Paradiso* XXVI, 139). I also pointed to a potential comparison between the location of Parnassus provided by Lucan in this passage ('Hesperio tantum quantum sommotus eoo', line 71), and Dante's idea of the mountain of Purgatory as located at the centre of the southern hemisphere, suggesting that these two mountains might perform a similar function in two different cultures, shaping and orientating the space around them, not simply in geographical but also in spiritual and moral terms.

<sup>15</sup> See the aforementioned passage from Statius' *Thebaid* (I, 60-63) and also *Thebaid* III 611-13. As regards Lucan's verses Mandruzzato believes that Lucan's reference to Cyrrha in this context can be explained as a rhetorical amplification and not as a geographical identification with one of Parnassus' peaks (Mandruzzato, 'Cirra, Nisa e i "due gioghi" danteschi').

<sup>16</sup> See Enrico Proto, 'Dante e i poeti latini. Contributo di nuovi riscontri alla *Divina Commedia*', *Atene e Roma*, 13 (1910), 83-103. The passage he refers to is from Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, I, 11.

*Etymologiarum libri*: ‘Parnasus mons Thessaliae iuxta Beotiam, qui gemino vertice est erectus in caelum. Hic in duo finditur iuga: Cyrrham et Nissam; unde et nuncupatus; eo quod in singulis iugis colebantur Apollo et Liber’.<sup>17</sup> The idea also appears in *Papias Vocabulista*, from the eleventh century: ‘Parnasus mons thessaliae: cuius duo funt iuga: Cirrha et Nysa quibus fingulis Appollo colebat et Liber’. Looking at these passages, another interesting point emerges. Late antique and medieval authors not only identify Cyrrha as one of Parnassus’ peaks, but mention it together with Nissa. The former peak is associated with Apollo, the latter with Bacchus (‘Liber’). The connection between the toponym Nissa and the cult of Bacchus was widely known in classical literature, even if there was no concordance on where this place was located.<sup>18</sup> As Violetta De Angelis pointed out, in some passages from Latin *auctores* the name of Nissa also appears in connection with Cyrrha, as in Juvenal’s *Satirae* (‘dominis Cirrhae Nysaeque’, VII 64) and – more significantly – in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* (I, 63-65).<sup>19</sup> In these verses, Lucan claims that the emperor is the real source of inspiration for his poem and that, by invoking the ‘Caesar’, he no longer needs Apollo or Bacchus:

Sed mihi iam numen, nec, sit e pectore vates  
accipio, Cirrhaea velim secreta moventem  
sollicitare deum Bacchumque avertere Nysa. (*Pharsalia* I, 64-65)

Lucan uses Cyrrha and Nissa to characterise Apollo and Bacchus, who are both considered gods that inspire poetry.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, looking once again at the passage from the fifth book of the *Pharsalia* quoted above, it is clear that Lucan also states that Parnassus is sacred to these two deities: ‘mons Phoebus Bromioque sacer’ (line 73). Accordingly, it is easy to imagine how this identification became common in late antiquity and during the Middle Ages, starting with the exegetical tradition on Lucan and then involving medieval mythographers and encyclopaedists.

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<sup>17</sup> *Etymologiarum libri* XIV, VIII, 11.

<sup>18</sup> For the connection between Nissa and Bacchus see, for example, Virgil, *Aeneid* VI, 805; Martialis, *Epigrams* IV, 44, 3. On the uncertain location of Nissa, see Mandruzzato, ‘Cirra, Nisa e i “due gioghi” danteschi’.

<sup>19</sup> De Angelis, “...e l’ultimo Lucano”, p. 184.

<sup>20</sup> In classical mythology, Bacchus was associated with fertility and wine. He was often depicted as connected with Apollo because inebriation leads to leisure, eloquence and poetic inspiration. For an overview of the cult of Bacchus in classical antiquity, see Otto Kern, ‘Dionysos’, in *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. by August Friedrich von Pauly and Georg Wissowa, 81 vols (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1894-1978), v (1903), 1023-46.

As regards the *Commedia*, *Paradiso* I, 36, shows that the connection between Apollo and Cyrrha was clear to Dante. What is not as clear is whether or not he also identified the first peak of the mountain as Nissa and, by extension, Bacchus. An investigation into the commentary tradition on Dante shows that this was the common opinion among the early commentators on the *Commedia*. With the exception of Iacomo della Lana, who remains vague on this particular issue, all the fourteenth-century commentators identify ‘l’un giogo di Parnaso’ with Bacchus. For example, the commentary of Benvenuto da Imola states:

Ad cuius literae intelligentiam oportet praescire, quod Parnasus est mons Graeciae in regione Beotiae, olim famosissimus, toto orbe terrarum celebratus carminibus omnium poetarum, etiam historicorum testimonio notissimus; qui altissimus ad coelum habet duo cornua, in altero quorum colebatur Apollo, in altero Bacchus. (Benvenuto da Imola, on *Paradiso* I, 16-18)

This interpretation is shared by the Ottimo Commento, Pietro Alighieri, the commentators of the Codice cassinese and the Chiose ambrosiane, as well as Francesco da Buti. The same identification is proposed by fifteenth-century exegeses and can be found in the commentaries of the Anonimo Fiorentino, Giovanni da Serravalle, Cristoforo Landino and Alessandro Vellutello.<sup>21</sup> Many of these authors also justify Dante’s potential reference to Apollo and Bacchus on the basis of allegorical explanations. Pietro Alighieri was probably the first one to introduce an allegorical interpretation of the two gods that was accepted by later commentators: ‘Tropologice vero, idest moraliter, iste mons Parnassi figurat universalem doctrinam, quae secundum Isidorum dicitur *a discendo*. Ejus duo juga figurant sapientiam et scientiam, quae insurgunt ex doctrina’.<sup>22</sup> Pietro Alighieri also specifies that Bacchus signifies ‘scientia rerum mundanarum’, which was sufficient in order to write the first two canticles, while Apollo represents a higher form of knowledge which derives from contemplation and is necessary in order to picture a heavenly dimension (‘sapientia; hoc est sapida scientia, quae respicit contemplationem aeternae veritatis’).<sup>23</sup> In the third edition of his commentary,

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<sup>21</sup> Curiously, the only commentary that differs from this trend and remains isolated is that of the Chiose cagliaritanne, which identifies one of the two peaks with Apollo and the other one with ‘la dea de la eloquenzia s[i]rocchia del decto deo Apollo’ (probably Minerva).

<sup>22</sup> See the first version of Pietro’s commentary, on *Paradiso* I, 16-18.

<sup>23</sup> The next section of the chapter will show that this reading is in line with the medieval interpretation of Apollo as a symbol of wisdom.

Pietro adds that Bacchus should be interpreted as ‘scientia et ars’ and Apollo as ‘sapientie et intellectu’.<sup>24</sup> This interpretation was largely reproduced by later fourteenth-century commentators, with no significant differences.

In the landscape of this widespread explanation, the exegesis of Benvenuto da Imola constitutes a partial and interesting exception. The author identifies Bacchus with *eloquentia* and Apollo with *sapientia*, but he also adds that these two names only represent different aspects of the same god, justifying this interpretation on the basis of Macrobius’ text:

Dico ergo quod per Apollinem et Bacchum autor intelligit unum et eundem deum sub diversis nominibus, sicut curiose et copiose demonstrat Macrobius libro Saturnalium, ubi dicit inter alia multa, quod sol cursus stellarum et ordinem rerum humanarum vel disponit vel significat; ideo poetae effectus solis varios sub nomine diversorum deorum notaverunt. (Benvenuto da Imola, on *Paradiso* I, 16-18)

Some other commentators, such as Giovanni da Serravalle, follow this interpretation. The overlap between the two gods, however, does not seem to leave space for the presence of a third and different deity and the general interpretation of the two peaks of Parnassus remains the same. The first peak, occupied by Bacchus, was understood to be the symbol of a human and earthly kind of knowledge. The second peak, which represented Apollo, was considered as an allegory for divine wisdom. This explanation was perfectly consistent not only with the medieval interpretations of Apollo as *sapientia*<sup>25</sup> but also with the general sense of Dante’s statement, which implies the necessity of a higher source of inspiration in order to complete his poem and represent the heavenly kingdom.

In more recent years, the hypothesis of Dante’s interpretation of the two peaks of Parnassus as representing Apollo and Bacchus has been resumed by Violetta De Angelis. In a brilliant and accurate article from 1993, she analyses the exegetical tradition on Latin *auctores* (especially Lucan) and provides solid evidence for the medieval identification of these two gods as the inhabitants of Parnassus, respectively on Cyrrha and Nissa.<sup>26</sup> On the basis of medieval glosses and commentaries on Latin texts, the scholar also offers an interpretation of Bacchus as the god

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<sup>24</sup> On *Paradiso* I, 1-36.

<sup>25</sup> See the next section of the chapter.

<sup>26</sup> De Angelis, “...e l’ultimo Lucano”.

who provides poets with the *sufficiencia* (from an economic point of view) and the *eloquentia*, thus further justifying his presence in Dante's introduction to *Paradiso*.

According to the classical sources shown so far and to De Angelis's argumentation, which is confirmed by the first commentators on the *Commedia* (closer to Dante's cultural background than us), the interpretation of 'l'un giogo di Parnaso' as Nissa, and therefore as a potential reference to Bacchus, makes perfect sense. The majority of textual evidence leads us towards this conclusion. The problem of this interpretation, which emerges at some point in the commentary tradition on the *Commedia*, is raised by the text of the poem itself and by the fact that in the course of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* Dante never asks Bacchus for poetic inspiration. There are only three allusions to Bacchus in the *Commedia*. The first occurs in *Inferno* XX, 59, when Dante talks about 'la città di Baco', referring to Thebes and evoking the imagery connected with Statius's *Thebaid*. In *Purgatorio* XVIII, 93 he mentions Bacchus for the second time, with a periphrasis that identifies the orgiastic rituals connected with the god ('pur che i Teban di Bacco avesser uopo'). The third and last occurrence of Bacchus in the *Commedia* is in *Paradiso* XIII 25-27, where the god is mentioned, together with Apollo, as the symbol of pagan songs and cults: 'Lì si canto non Bacco, non Peana, / ma tre persone in divina natura, / e in una persona essa e l'umana'. The fact that none of these references involves the sphere of poetic inspiration starts raising some doubts in Dante's commentators during the fifteenth century.

For example, in commenting on this tercet Cristoforo Landino contradicts himself. He writes that 'Parnaso è monte in Boetia [...] il quale è altissimo et ha due gioghi, l'uno dedicato ad Appolline, l'altro a Baccho' but adds, a few lines later, that 'Parnaso è consecrato alle muse et in quello habitano intorno al fonte pegaseo'.<sup>27</sup> The same confusion is present in the commentary of Alessandro Vellutello, who certainly had Landino's exegesis in mind. Baldassarre Lombardi is the first one to point at the inconsistency of Bacchus' presence in the opening invocation of *Paradiso* by comparing it with the previous invocations of the poem, which are all addressed to the Muses:

Ma quì, dich'io, non lascia a noi il Poeta la briga di cercare quale cosa per amendue i gioghi intenda: facendoci egli stesso bastantemente chiaro capire, che pe 'l secondo giogo, che abbisognagli per la presente cantica, intende il di fresco invocato Appolline; e pe 'l primo, non Bacco, che mai non ha egli invocato, ma le Muse. (Baldassarre Lombardi, on *Paradiso* I, 16-18)

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<sup>27</sup> On *Paradiso* I, 16-18.

This is a completely new reading of the passage. It is the first time that ‘l’un giogo di Parnaso’ is considered as a reference to the nine sisters rather than Bacchus. After Baldassarre Lombardi, and up until contemporary commentaries, the majority of the interpreters of the *Commedia* appear to give priority to the internal dynamics of the poem and prefer to think of the first peak of Parnassus as a reference to the previous invocations of the poem. The meaning of Dante’s statement and the role played by the Muses in the first two canticles of the *Commedia* would easily allow this interpretation.

The idea of the two peaks of Parnassus as inhabited by the Muses and Apollo, however, does not seem to have any literary antecedents. As already mentioned, the Muses were traditionally associated with Helicon, another mountain in the region of Boeotia that was very similar to Parnassus in terms of function and characterisation. In Chapter 3, I showed a potential overlap between Parnassian and Heliconian elements in the classical tradition that led medieval mythographers and commentators to think about Helicon as the same mountain as Parnassus, or at least a particular part of it. If we look at the commentary tradition on Virgil, it is possible to detect an identification of the two peaks of Parnassus not as Cyrrha and Nissa, but as Helicon and Cithaeron. In his commentary on the seventh book of the *Aeneid*, explaining the line ‘Pandite nunc Heliconae, deae, cantusque movete’ (*Aeneid* VII, 641), Servius identifies Helicon as one of Parnassus’s peaks: ‘Parnasus, mons Thessaliae, dividitur in Cithaeronem Liberi et Heliconem Apollinis, cuius sunt musae’ (on *Aeneid* VII, 641).<sup>28</sup> In Servius’s version, the two peaks of Parnassus are called Cithaeron and Helicon. The former is occupied by Bacchus, the latter by Apollo and the Muses. The same interpretation is also repeated in his commentary on *Aeneid* X, 163 (‘Parnasus [...] in duo finditur iuga, Cithaeronem Liberi et Heliconem Apollinis et Musarum’) and can be found in the commentary tradition on other Latin authors as well, such as the *Supplementum adnotationum super Lucanum*: ‘Cyrra et Nisa duo iuga Parnasi montis «sunt», quae alio nomine «Helicon» et Citheron appellantur. In Cyrra seu «Helicone» Apollo, in Nisa vero, quod et Citheron, Liber colitur’ (V, 95).<sup>29</sup> Two different traditions appear to be melded in this passage. The peak of Parnassus inhabited by Apollo (and possibly the Muses) is called Cyrrha or Helicon, while the one inhabited by Bacchus is called Nissa or Cithaeron. The same version is reported by Isidore of Seville at the beginning of

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<sup>28</sup> On the relationship between Dante and Servius (and the exegetical tradition on Virgil in general), see Sebastiano Italia, *Dante e l’esegesi virgiliana. Tra Servio, Fulgenzio e Bernardo Silvestre* (Rome: Bonanno, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> See also Arnulf of Orléans, *Glosule super Lucanum* V, 72: ‘GEMINO propter Eliconem et Citeronem’.

the seventh century. After stating that the two peaks of Parnassus are called Cyrrha and Nissa, Isidore adds that the two crests are also named Helicon and Cithaeron after two brothers.<sup>30</sup>

This double identification must have been common during the Middle Ages, since it is also proposed by some fourteenth-century commentators on Dante. Pietro Alighieri, in the first version of his commentary, states that the two peaks of Parnassus are named Helicon and Cithaeron, and that Cyrrha and Nissa are two cities located on the two crests, respectively sacred to Apollo and Bacchus: ‘Dextrum jugum dicitur Helicon: sinistrum Cithaeron. In Helicone erat Cirrha civitas, in qua Apollo colebatur: in Cithaerone erat alia civitas dicta Nysa, ubi Bacchus colebatur, et ideo Bacchus vocatur Niseus’.<sup>31</sup> In her article from 1993, Violetta De Angelis briefly mentions the interaction between these two traditions but does not pay much attention to it. She focuses on the analysis of the literary and commentary tradition on Cyrrha and Nissa and underlines the fact that, according to the most traditional idea, Helicon was associated with the Muses but was a different place from Parnassus.<sup>32</sup> She also recalls the invocation of *Purgatorio* XXIX, where Dante demonstrates awareness of this relationship by mentioning the Muses and Helicon in the same tercet (‘Or convien che Elicon per me versi / e Uranie m’aiuti col suo coro / forti cose a pensar mettere in versi’, lines 40-42). According to De Angelis, this is a strong textual sign that ‘l’un giogo di Parnaso’ of *Paradiso* I cannot refer to the Muses, since they have been associated with Helicon and not Parnassus a few cantos earlier.<sup>33</sup> This observation, however, does not take into account the potential confusion between Helicon and Parnassus that I have discussed in Chapter 3 and that is

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<sup>30</sup> ‘Parnasus [...] in duo finditur iuga: Cyrrham et Nissam [...]; eo quod in singulis iugis colebantur Apollo et Liber. Haec iuga a duobus fratribus Cithaeron et Helicon appellantur’ (*Etymologiarum libri* XIV, VIII, 11).

<sup>31</sup> On *Paradiso* I, 16-18. In the third version of his commentary, Pietro explicitly quotes Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiarum libri* to support his interpretation. Amongst thirteenth-century commentators, the same identification is proposed by Francesco da Buti: ‘Citeron, ove s’onorava Baco che era lo dio della pratica, et eravi la città chiamata Nisa, e giù al bosco e a la fonte lo tempio consecrato a Baco, e la città dove era lo studio delle scienze pratiche [...]. Elicon, in sul quale è una città chiamata Cirra nella quale si onorava Appollo, et era in essa lo studio delle scienze contemplative’ (on *Paradiso* I, 1-36).

<sup>32</sup> De Angelis, “...e l’ultimo Lucano”, pp 183-86.

<sup>33</sup> In addition to the example given by De Angelis, it is also notable that in the invocation of *Paradiso* XVIII, 82-87, Dante addresses a generic Muse calling her ‘diva Pegasëa’. The adjective ‘Pegasëa’ refers to Hippocrene, the spring of Helicon generated by a kick from the winged horse Pegasus (see Ovid, *Metamorphoses* V, 250-59 and *Fasti* V, 7-8). Furthermore, as already mentioned, in the so-called *Epistle to Cangrande*, Dante compares himself to Minerva approaching Mount Helicon (*Epistles* XIII, 1), quoting the Ovidian episode of the poetic contest between the Muses and the Pierides (analysed in Chapter 3) and proving himself aware of the connection between the Muses and Helicon.

emerging from the analysis of medieval sources.<sup>34</sup> The texts analysed above demonstrate the existence of a commentary tradition in which Helicon was understood to be one of Parnassus's peaks, inhabited by Apollo and possibly by the Muses. There is no reason to assume that Dante could not think about Helicon as a part of Parnassus, considering that this interpretation was offered by some of the most influential commentators and encyclopedists during the Middle Ages.

Nevertheless, even when Helicon is considered one of Parnassus's peaks, the dualism of Apollo and Bacchus does not disappear. The passages shown above describe the two crests of Parnassus, whether named Cyrrha and Nissa or Helicon and Cithaeron, as still inhabited by these two gods. The medieval commentators on the *Commedia*, probably relying on these sources, do not detect a contradiction in the potential reference to Bacchus in *Paradiso* I. In Servius's interpretation, the Muses are also involved but they live together with Apollo on Helicon, not on the opposite peak (the one that Dante mentions as 'l'un giogo di Parnaso').

To support his interpretation of the first peak of Parnassus as a reference to the Muses, Baldassare Lombardi also points to a potential antecedent and refers to the first-century grammarian Probus, mentioning a passage of his commentary on the *Georgics* which shows a potentially different identification. In this passage, Probus states that Cithaeron is occupied by Bacchus and the Muses:

Compirà adunque l'intelligenza del presente passo ciò che scrive Probo al libro terzo della Georgica di Virgilio v. 43 *Cithaeron mons est Beotiae. Ibi arcana Liberi patris sacra celebrantur tertio quoque anno, quae trieterica dicuntur. Existimatur autem Liber esse cum Musis; et ideo ex hedera fronde eius corona poetis datur.* (Baldassarre Lombardi, on *Paradiso* I, 16-18)

Probus' interpretation at least demonstrates the existence of a tradition which implies the presence of Apollo on one of Parnassus' peaks and of the Muses on the other, and which is mentioned by many other commentators who support this hypothesis along with Baldassarre Lombardi. Probus' idea, however, appears isolated in the medieval mythographic tradition and there is no textual proof that Dante knew his commentary. Moreover, in the passage quoted above, Probus refers to

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<sup>34</sup> Moreover, if it is true that Dante often associated the Muses with Helicon, it is also worth noting that in the second *Eclogue* Dante calls the Muses 'Castalias sorores' (line 54), and introduces a relation between the Muses and Castalia, which was the spring traditionally associated with Parnassus. The overlap and potential interchangeability of Parnassian and Heliconian elements is once again evident. On Castalia's relationship to Parnassus and Apollo see, for example, Virgil, *Georgics* III, 291-93; Lucan, *Pharsalia* V, 186-89; Statius, *Thebaid* I, 696-98.

Cithaeron as inhabited by the Muses together with Bacchus. This interpretation is not only contradictory to the most common tradition, according to which the Muses live on Mount Helicon, it is also unrelated to Dante's idea since in several passages of his *oeuvre* he demonstrates awareness of the relationship between the Muses and Helicon. The toponym Cithaeron never appears in the *Commedia*,<sup>35</sup> and the possibility of Dante's conception of Parnassus as divided into Helicon or Cyrrha, inhabited by Apollo, and Cithaeron or Nissa, occupied by the Muses, seems to be ruled out. According to the data collected so far, the only possible way to identify 'l'un giogo di Parnaso' with the Muses would be to imagine the two peaks as Cyrrha (occupied by Apollo) and Helicon (occupied by the nine sisters). However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no trace of this kind of tradition in the texts of Latin authors and in the commentaries on them. Scholars who support the identification of the first 'giogo' with the Muses usually explain these inconsistencies by suggesting an overlap of different mythological traditions in Dante's imagination.<sup>36</sup>

Some further contributions to this complex exegetical problem that could reconcile the internal dynamics of the poem and the textual evidence collected so far might come from the reflection on the figure of Bacchus himself, which has so far received little attention among scholars.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4.3 BACCHUS AND PARNASSUS: AN INTERPRETATIVE HYPOTHESIS

I will start by offering a different point of view on the main argument against Bacchus in this discussion. From the eighteenth century onwards, commentators on the *Commedia* have pointed out that Dante never invokes Bacchus in his poem. This observation, however, may have led us to a wrong approach to the problem. In *Paradiso* I, Dante claims that 'l'un giogo di Parnaso' has been sufficient in order to compose the first two cantiche of the *Commedia*. There is no need to presume

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<sup>35</sup> The name 'Citerone' appears three times in the *Fiore* (CCXV, 8; CCXVII, 3; CCXVIII 6) but refers to Citera, the island where Venus was born. Similarly, in *Purgatorio* XXVII 95, the adjective 'Citerea' refers to Venus. See Luigi Vanossi, 'Citerone' in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, II (1970), 26.

<sup>36</sup> This is the position maintained, for example, by Proto, 'Dante e i poeti latini', and Mandruzzato, 'Cirra, Nisa e i "due gioghi" danteschi'.

<sup>37</sup> One of the few studies on the image of Bacchus in the *Commedia* is in Ronald Martinez, 'Ovid's Crown of Stars (*Paradiso* 13.1-27)', in *Dante and Ovid*, pp. 123-38. Martinez analyses the references to Bacchus and to the myth of Ariadne in *Paradiso* XIII and proposes a series of associations between the god and the concept Nature, the image of the sun or the Holy Spirit, showing the potential of a careful investigation of the figure of Bacchus in medieval imagination and in the *Commedia*.

that he is referring to the first peak of Parnassus as something that he has previously invoked in the course of the poem. Invocations to Bacchus were not common in classical literature. Even though the god was associated with poetry, he was rarely addressed in actual invocations unless the subject of the poem was closely related to other aspects of his cult.<sup>38</sup> Given the absence of significant literary antecedents, it is likely that the potential reference to Bacchus in *Paradiso* I was not connected with the rhetorical *topos* of invocations.

The first commentators on the *Commedia* associated Bacchus with human knowledge and the practical arts, in opposition to the divine and contemplative wisdom represented by Apollo (*scientia* on the one hand, *sapientia* on the other).<sup>39</sup> Following this allegorical explanation, Dante's statement in *Paradiso* I, 16-18 can be read as a reflection on the different nature of the three cantiche. The first two realms of the afterlife pertain to an earthly dimension and their representation could easily rely on Dante's literary and philosophical studies, represented by Bacchus. In *Paradiso*, however, the heavenly nature of Dante's vision transcends his human capacities and he requires divine grace in order to accomplish his prophetic duties. This interpretation is exemplified by Francesco da Buti:

Dice l'autore che in fine a questa cantica li è vastato lo studio delle scienze pratiche a trattare de la materia della prima cantica e della seconda; cioè delle virtù politiche e morali co le quali l'uomo si cessa dal peccato, e va alle virtù purgatorie colle quali si sodisfa a la colpa; e così si viene a lo stato della innocenza, ve sono le virtù dell'animo purgato; cioè contemplative a le quali è bisogno la teorica e la pratica: imperò che non bastarebbe pur la pratica; e però ben dice ora: [...] Infino a qui abbo trattato la mia materia co le scienze pratiche; ma da quici inanti m'è mestieri d'usare e le pratiche e le teoriche: imperò che sono cose contemplative et anco attive. (Francesco da Buti, on *Paradiso* I, 13-36)

This interpretation does not contradict the previous reflections on the role of the Muses in the *Commedia*. The nine sisters (invoked in the course of the first two cantiche) and Bacchus can be

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<sup>38</sup> Virgil, for example, invokes him in the second book of the *Georgics*, where he talks about plantations: 'Nunc te, Bacche, canam, nec non silvestria tecum / virgulta et prolem tarde crescentis olivae. / [...] / Huc, pater o Lenae, veni?' (*Georgics* II, 2-7). Ovid, in *Fasti* III 789-90, invokes Bacchus to explain some aspects of his cult: 'Mite caput, pater huc placataque cornua vertas / et des ingenio vela secunda meo!'.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, the commentaries of Pietro Alighieri, Benvenuto da Imola and Francesco da Buti.

interpreted as two aspects of the same concept. It is possible that by mentioning ‘l’un giogo di Parnaso’, Dante is not referring to the previous invocations of the poem but simply using a different metaphor to explain the increase in his poetic challenge. Separating the potential reference to Bacchus from the dynamic of the invocations enables a reading of this passage which reconciles two lines of inquiry that have traditionally been considered incompatible.

In the light of these observations, it is also useful to re-examine the role of Bacchus in Dante’s poem outside the framework of the invocations. As I have already mentioned, Bacchus appears for the first time in *Inferno* XX. In this canto, Dante and Virgil encounter the damned souls of the diviners, whose human appearance is horribly distorted as their faces are turned towards their backs.<sup>40</sup> The canto is renowned for its *excursus* into the story of Manto (Tiresia’s daughter) and the origins of Mantua, which probably aims to clear Virgil’s name from the accusation of divination. In the course of this long digression, which intentionally contradicts some details from the *Aeneid*,<sup>41</sup> Virgil explains that, after Tiresia’s death, Thebes was defeated by Creon and Manto left for Italy. On this occasion, Thebes is called ‘la città di Baco’ (59):

Poscia che ’l padre suo di vita uscìo  
e venne serva la città di Baco,  
questa gran tempo per lo mondo gio. (*Inferno* XX, 58-60)

In addition to Virgil’s personal and literary involvement, the entire episode immediately evokes a relationship with Statius’ *Thebaid*, where the episode of Manto is recalled in books IV, 463-585 and VII, 758-59. This allusion can be read as part of an intertextual dialogue with Statius which becomes particularly evident in the second part of *Inferno*.<sup>42</sup> In this context, the role of Bacchus appears quite

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<sup>40</sup> For an overview of the main themes of the canto see Stefano Carrai, ‘Il corteo degli indovini. Lettura del XX dell’*Inferno*’, *L’Alighieri. Rassegna dantesca*, 46 (2005) 49-62, and Sonia Gentili, ‘Canto XX. Deformità morale e rottura dei vincoli sociali: gli indovini’, in *Lectura Dantis Romana*, I.II. *Inferno. Canti XVIII-XXXIV* (2013), 646-81.

<sup>41</sup> In *Aeneid* X, 198-200, Virgil states that Manto is the mother of Ocnos (the actual founder of Mantua). In Dante’s text, the foundation of Mantua is directly connected with Manto, and the diviner is called ‘vergine cruda’ at line 82 (see *Thebaid* IV, 463).

<sup>42</sup> On the presence of Statius’ intertextuality in Dante’s *Inferno*, see, for example, Teodolinda Barolini, ‘Risoluzione epica’, in Teodolinda Barolini, *Il miglior fabbro. Dante e i poeti della ‘Commedia’* (Turin: Boringhieri, 1993), pp. 153-226; Rossi, ‘Prospezioni filologiche per lo Stazio di Dante’; Violetta De Angelis, ‘Lo Stazio di Dante: poesia e scuola’, *Schede umanistiche*, 16, 2 (2002), 29-69; Lorenzo Geri, ‘Percorsi staziani nell’*Inferno* di Dante: l’abisso della tragedia’, *Linguistica e Letteratura*, 35, 1-2 (2010), 109-135.

superficial, since the god is simply mentioned as patron of Thebes. Moreover, the references to Thebes in *Inferno* are generally negative. The ‘city of Bacchus’ is mainly associated with the idea of a fratricidal war and is often mentioned by Dante to represent the infernal annihilation of the relationships between man and man, and man and God.<sup>43</sup>

The second occurrence of Bacchus’ name is in *Purgatorio* XVIII.<sup>44</sup> The canto opens with a long theological discussion about the nature of love that clearly implies a dialogue with Dante’s juvenile works and models. In open contrast with the meditative atmosphere of this first section, in the second part of the canto Dante describes the hectic movements of the slothful, who run around the fourth terrace of Purgatory shouting examples of punished sloth and virtuous zeal. This group of racing penitents is introduced with a reference to the frenetic orgiastic rituals in honor of Bacchus:

E quale Ismeno già vide a Asopo  
lungo di sè di notte furia e calca,  
pur che i Teban di Bacco avesser uopo,  
cotal per quel giron suo passo falca. (*Purgatorio* XVIII, 91-94)

The presence of Bacchus is once again intertextually connected with Statius and associated with a devotional context.<sup>45</sup> In this case, however, the Statian reference implies a positive meaning. The

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, the references to Capaneo (*Inferno* XIV, 68-72 and XXV, 14-15), Anfiarao (*Inferno* XX, 31-36), Eteocles and Polynices (*Inferno* XXVI, 54), the Theban Furies (*Inferno* XXX, 22), the city itself (*Inferno* XXXIII, 89), and Tideus and Menalippus (*Inferno* XXXIII, 130-31).

<sup>44</sup> For some readings of the canto, see Aleardo Sacchetto, ‘Il canto degli accidiosi’, in Aleardo Sacchetto, *Dieci letture dantesche* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1960) pp. 131-159; Giorgio Padoan, ‘Il canto XVIII del *Purgatorio*’, in *Lectura Dantis Scaligera*, II. *Purgatorio* (1967), 657-92; Luca Azzetta, “‘fervore arguto’, “buon volere” e “giusto amor”. Lettura di *Purgatorio* XVIII’, *Rivista di Studi Danteschi*, 6 (2006), 241-79; Mira Mocan, ‘Canti XVI.XVII-XVIII. Amore, libero arbitrio e fantasia: una teoria gravitazionale’, in *Esperimenti danteschi. Purgatorio 2009*, pp. 147-74; Pasquale Porro, ‘Canto XVIII. Amore e libero arbitrio in Dante’, *Lectura Dantis Romana*, II. *Purgatorio. Canti XVIII-XXXIII* (2014), 523-60.

<sup>45</sup> See the descriptions of Bacchic rituals in *Thebaid* IX, 434-36 and 478-80. In the passage from Statius’s *Thebaid*, the river Ismenus complains about the massacre that happened along his banks and underlines the difference between the carnage of the war and the holy chaos of Bacchic rituals.

pagan rituals in honor of Bacchus are recalled by Dante but recontextualised in a Christian setting, thus revealing their allegorical and figural connotations.<sup>46</sup>

The third reference to Bacchus is in the opening section of *Paradiso* XIII.<sup>47</sup> At the beginning of this canto, Dante describes the two circles of the wise dancing and praising the triune nature of God:

Lì si cantò non Bacco, non Peana,  
ma tre persone in divina natura,  
e in una persona essa e l'umana. (*Paradiso* XIII, 25-27)

First of all, the presence of Bacchus and Apollo in the same context suggests Dante's awareness of their relationship, which, as shown above, is connected with the motif of Parnassus' peaks. This line indicates that Dante could have been familiar with the Latin sources and commentaries that interpreted Apollo and Bacchus as deities connected to each other and inhabiting Parnassus. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Dante refers to the songs in honor of 'Bacco' and 'Peana' in order to stress the difference between an earthly and a heavenly experience. The Heaven of the Sun, which occupies cantos X-XIII and part of canto XIV, is the first sphere located beyond the shadow of the Earth. This means that, from this point onwards, the residual influence of the human dimension on the celestial spheres tends to vanish. Against this background, the reference to the pagan devotional context is not used with the aim of prefiguring a Christian reality (as in *Purgatorio* XVIII) but rather revealing the superiority of Christian truth over classical spirituality.

In the light of these observations, it is possible to recognise a development in the function of Bacchus throughout the three cantiche of the *Commedia*: from simply referring to a classical form of devotion (in *Inferno* XX), to establishing a figural relationship between a pagan and a Christian

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<sup>46</sup> As Giuseppe Ledda points out, in these cantos of *Purgatorio* there is an intensification of classical references with allegorical implications (see Ledda, 'I miti ovidiani (e la sapienza di Stazio) nella cornice dei golosi').

<sup>47</sup> On the Heaven of the Sun, see, among others, the studies of Paola Nasti (Paola Nasti, 'The Wise Poet: Solomon in Dante's Heaven of the Sun', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 27 (2001), 103-08; Paola Nasti, 'Intertestualità, specularità, e riscrittura: il trionfo di Salomone', in Paola Nasti, *Favole d'amore e 'saver profondo'. La tradizione salomonica in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2007), pp. 159-229) and the analyses of Selene Sarteschi and Paolo Cherchi ('Il cielo del Sole. Per una lettura della *Commedia* a 'lunghe campate', *Critica del testo*, 14 (2011), 311-31. For an accurate lectura of this specific canto see also, Antonio del Castello, 'Canto XIII, Il "re sufficiente" e la divina sapienza del governo', in *Lectura Dantis Romana*. III.I *Paradiso. Canti I-XVII* (2015), 382-407.

dimension (in *Purgatorio* XVIII), to displaying the final supremacy of the truth of God (in *Paradiso* XIII). In other words, these three references to the cult of Bacchus synthesise the complex relationship between Dante and the pagan world and exemplify the range of possible interactions between Dante's Christian poem and its classical antecedents.

With this in mind, the potential identification of 'l'un giogo di Parnaso' with Bacchus could acquire new implications and could be read as part of the path of appropriation and assimilation of the classical world in Dante's *Commedia*. While in *Paradiso* I Dante states the necessity of integrating his human knowledge (represented by Bacchus) with a higher form of wisdom (represented by Apollo) in order to complete his poem, in *Paradiso* XVIII he goes beyond the logic of allegory and clearly states that the songs in honour of pagan gods cannot be compared to the verses written to celebrate the glory and mysteries of the Christian God. In this context, Apollo and Bacchus no longer represent the intellectual tools required by Dante to become worthy and capable of describing the realm of God; they are the sign that the assimilation of classical models is now complete and the author of the *Commedia* has moved forward. Thinking about 'l'un giogo di Parnaso' as an allusion to Bacchus would help us enlarge our idea of Parnassus and see other aspects of Dante's re-elaboration of this specific mythological unit in the course of his poem. We may look at the mention of the two peaks of Parnassus at the beginning of *Paradiso* not as a reference to the invocations of the poem but as a reflection on human knowledge and its interaction with the divine. As shown over the course of this thesis, this reading would be perfectly consistent with the main lines of reflection raised by Parnassus in the poem, which are always aimed at defining Dante's poetry through comparison with – and critical incorporation of – classical texts and images.

#### 4.4 'O BUON APOLLO': THE DELPHIC GOD BETWEEN THE PAGAN AND THE CHRISTIAN WORLD

Another aspect of this invocation that has been amply discussed by Dante scholars is the role and meaning of Apollo in this specific passage of the poem. As I will show in this fourth section of the chapter, here the figure of the Delphic god brings together classical and Christian imagery, mixing both Parnassian and biblical elements and pointing to the fact that the assimilation and recontextualisation of classical poetry is now complete.

From a literary point of view, the invocation to Apollo is as rooted in the classical tradition as the invocation to the Muses. In classical mythology, Apollo was the son of Jupiter and Leto,

who is born on the isle of Delos as Dante recalls in *Purgatorio* XX, 130-32.<sup>48</sup> As Jamie Claire Fumo points out in her study on the reception of Apollo in English medieval literature, the figure of the Delphic god has been ambivalent and complex since ancient times. Owing to the circumstances of his birth (from a mortal woman) and his role as prophet and interpreter of the gods' will, he seems to occupy an intermediary position between the human and the divine.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, he plays multiple roles in Latin literature and appears connected with multiple areas, such as prophecy, the foundation of cities, the sun, the concept of youth, the sphere of medicine and healing and, of course, the field of art and poetry, not only as patron of poets and inspirer of verses but – Fumo claims – also as a 'mythic projection of poetic praxis itself'.<sup>50</sup> In other words, the figure of Apollo already had a metapoetic function in classical literature and his appearance in a text often signaled the presence of a reflection on poetry and poetic authority.<sup>51</sup>

This variety in the classical representation of Apollo is inherited by the Middle Ages, when the Delphic god is still depicted in multiple roles that medieval mythographers sometimes try to organise and merge together. In this respect, it is worth remembering the *topos* of the so-called *triplex Apollo*, also mentioned by Fumo, which we can find in a relevant text for the Middle Ages such as Servius' commentary on Virgil's *Eclogues*,<sup>52</sup> then in the *Vatican Mythographers*<sup>53</sup> and later in Boccaccio's *Genealogiae deorum gentilium*.<sup>54</sup> In these texts, Apollo is depicted as a god with a threefold identity, namely *Sol* in the celestial regions, where he is associated with harmony, *Liber* on earth, and *Apollo* in the underworld, where he is connected with destructive elements:

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<sup>48</sup> For an analysis of this specific episode and its medieval reception, see Chapter 1. For an overview of the cult of Apollo in the ancient world see Ley, 'Apollo'.

<sup>49</sup> Jamie Claire Fumo, *The Legacy of Apollo: Antiquity, Authority and Chaucerian Poetics* (Toronto-Buffalo; University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 32-33. Fumo's book is particularly useful to understand how both Ovid and Virgil's depictions of Apollo (which are quite different from each other) influenced the medieval interpretation and re-semantisation of this classical deity.

<sup>50</sup> Fumo, *The Legacy of Apollo*, p. 25.

<sup>51</sup> In the course of her book, for example, Fumo shows how Virgil and Ovid represent Apollo in different ways and explains how these different representations reflect a different approach to the Augustan propaganda and a different idea of poetry (Fumo, *The Legacy of Apollo*, especially Chapter 1, 'Apollo as Human God: Ovid and Medieval Ovidianism', pp. 23-75).

<sup>52</sup> Servius, on *Eclogues* V, 66.

<sup>53</sup> *Mythographus Vaticanus* II, 38 and *Mythographus Vaticanus* III, 8, 16.

<sup>54</sup> *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* IV, 3.

Constat autem triplicis esse Apollinem potestatis et eundem esse Solem apud superos, Liberum patrem in terris, Apollinem apud inferos. Unde etiam tria insignia circa eius simulacrum uidemus, lyram que nobis celestis armonie imaginem monstrat, scribemeum que eum etiam terrenum numen ostendit, sagittas quibus inferni deus et noxius indicatur. (*Mythographus Vaticanus* II, 38)

Such readings of the figure of Apollo testify to the complexity of his cult in ancient times, which passes to the Middle Ages in the form of a multiplicity of interpretations.

The attitude of medieval authors towards Apollo is not unambiguous. The figure of the Delphic god is sometimes denigrated as a pagan idol and sometimes worshipped as a symbol of wisdom. Some Fathers of the Church, for example, are suspicious (when not openly accusatory) towards Apollo, underling the contradictions and inconsistencies of his figure and mocking his prophetic talent. In the *Divine Institutes*, Lactantius uses Apollo's oracles to predict the advent of Christ, turning the Delphic god into the foreseer of the fall of paganism.<sup>55</sup> In the *De civitate Dei*, Augustine maintains that it is foolish to worship Apollo for his prophetic talent since he was not able to predict some events that would affect him personally.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, in the texts of late-antique mythographers such as Hyginus' *Fabulae* (a compendium of myths which dates back to the first or second century) or Fulgentius' *Mythologiarum libri tres* (from the fifth or sixth century), the myths connected to Apollo are reported without any negative connotations and the figure that emerges from these accounts is that of a powerful and wise deity. As we will see, it is on this tradition that later mythographers and commentators rely to establish a closer connection between Apollo and Christ.

In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville summarises Apollo's characteristics with these words:

Apollinem quamvis divinatorem et medicum vellent, ipsum tamen etiam Solem dixerunt, quasi solum. Ipsum Titan, quasi unum ex Titanis, qui adversus Iovem non fecit. Ipsum Phoebum, quasi ephebum, hoc est adolescentem. Unde et sol puer pingitur, eo quod cottidie oriatur et nova luce nascatur. Pythium quoque eundem Apollinem vocari aiunt a Pythone inmensae molis serpente, cuius non magis venena

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<sup>55</sup> Lactantius, *Divinarum institutionum* I, 7, 1; I, 7, 9; IV, 13, 11; VII, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei* III, 2. In *De civitate Dei* VIII, 23-24, Augustine compares Apollo not to a god but to a demon.

quam magnitudo terrebat. Hunc Apollo sagittarum ictibus sternens nomiis quoque spolia reportavit, ut Pythius vocaretur. (*Etymologiarum libri VIII*, XI, 53-55)

In the *Commedia*, Apollo is also represented in a multiplicity of roles and with reference to different aspects of his cult. The figure of the Delphic god only emerges in the second cantica of Dante's poem, as happens for all the mythological imagery connected to Parnassus in the poem (with the exception of the invocations to the Muses in *Inferno* II and XXXII). In some cases, the god is mentioned simply as a synonym for the sun, as in *Paradiso* XXIX, which starts with Dante's reference to the moon and the sun as 'li figli di Latona', namely Diana and Apollo (line 1).<sup>57</sup> His relationship with the sun is also recalled in *Purgatorio* XX. As already noted in Chapter 1, here Dante mentions Apollo's birth, comparing Delos' tremors to the earthquake that shook the mountain of Purgatory when the soul of Statius became worthy of ascending to heaven. On this occasion, Apollo is still addressed as one of 'li due occhi del cielo' but Dante is referring to the actual deity, son of Leto and Jupiter, rather than an astronomical body.<sup>58</sup> With the epithet 'Timbreo' (from his temple in Thymbra), Apollo is depicted as a fighting and victorious god in *Purgatorio* XII, where his name emerges for the first time in the poem. Here, at lines 31-33, describing the examples of punished pride on the first terrace of Purgatory, Dante refers to the battle between the main classical deities (Apollo, Minerva, Mars and their father Jupiter) and the Giants, who dared to rebel against the Olympic gods and were inevitably defeated.<sup>59</sup>

However, the trait of the god that is most relevant for this research, and for Dante's metapoetic discourse, is his role as Parnassian deity and his relationship with the spheres of poetry and prophecy. This role emerges in the invocation of *Paradiso* I and then again in *Paradiso* II, in a

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<sup>57</sup> *Paradiso* XXIX, 1-3: 'Quando ambedue li figli di Latona, / coperti del Montone e de la Libra, / fanno de l'orizzonte insieme zona'. The same reference to Apollo as the sun can be found in *Monarchia* I, XI, 5; II, VIII, 13, and in *Epistole* VI, 8, where the image of Apollo-sun is used as a metaphor for papal authority. On the presence of Apollo in Dante's *oeuvre* see Giorgio Padoan, 'Apollo', in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, I (1970), p. 318.

<sup>58</sup> *Purgatorio* XX, 130-32: 'Certo non si scoteo sì forte Delo, / pria che Latona in lei facesse 'l nido / a parturir li due occhi del cielo'.

<sup>59</sup> *Purgatorio* XII, 31-33: 'Vedeo Timbreo, vedeo Pallade e Marte, / armati ancora, intorno al padre loro, / mirar le membra d'i Giganti sparte'. For a classical reference to this scene, see Statius, *Thebaid* II, 595-601. In Dante's *oeuvre*, other references to Apollo can be found in *Convivio* IV, XXIII, 14, where Dante mentions the horses that pull the sun's chariot, and in *Convivio* IV, XXV, 6, where he refers to Apollo's prophecy to Adrastus.

passage that I will analyse at the end of this chapter where he is depicted, together with Minerva and the Muses, as the protector of Dante's ambitious poetic project.<sup>60</sup>

Dante's representation of Apollo as patron of poetry in *Paradiso* I is complex and multilayered, and it mixes together classical and biblical elements, creating a very original image of the Delphic god. First of all, in order to understand the importance of the figure of Apollo and of its role for the definition of Dante's poetry in *Paradiso*, it is worth briefly looking at Dante's reuse of two of the main myths connected with Apollo in this invocation, namely the myth of Marsyas and the myth of Daphne.

When Dante asks Apollo to enter his chest and breathe inspiration into him at line 19 ('entra nel petto mio e spira tue'),<sup>61</sup> he also adds a very specific comparison: 'sì come quando Marsia traesti / de la vagina de le membra sue' (lines 20-21). The episode Dante is referring to is recalled by Ovid in the sixth book of the *Metamorphoses* (lines 382-400). Here, Apollo is described in the act of flaying the satyr Marsyas, who dared to challenge the god in a music contest because he was a fine player of the flute. As often happens in these Ovidian myths of arrogance, the mortal satyr is defeated by the god with his lyre and then severely punished. Some of the events that precede this moment can be found in the sixth book of the *Fasti* (lines 695-711), where Ovid explains how, after inventing the flute, Minerva saw herself playing it, found herself ugly and decided to throw it away. The instrument was then discovered by the satyr Marsyas, who became an amazing player and foolishly challenged Apollo.<sup>62</sup>

The presence of this violent myth, which is particularly cruel in Ovid's account, at the beginning of *Paradiso* has attracted the attention of many scholars, who have proposed different interpretations and explanations of Dante's reworking of this specific mythological element. Giuseppe Ledda has shown how this episode belongs to the series of Ovidian myths used by Dante to exemplify the sin of *hybris* in the *Commedia* or, in this specific case, of artistic *hybris*.<sup>63</sup> Just as at

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<sup>60</sup> *Paradiso* II, 7-9: 'L'acqua ch'io prendo già mai non si corse; / Minerva spira, e conducemi Apollo, / e nove Muse mi dimostran l'Orse'.

<sup>61</sup> On the meaning of the verb *spirare* in this passage see Sergio Casali, 'Apollo e Marsia nel proemio del *Paradiso*', in *Miti, figure, metamorfosi*, pp. 25-47.

<sup>62</sup> In Ovid's *Fasti*, it is Minerva herself who recalls this episode. References to this myth can also be found in Ovid's *Ars amatoria* (III, 503-08), in Propertius' *Elegies* (II, 30, 16-18) and in Statius (*Thebaid* IV, 183-86; *Silvae*, V, III, 85-89).

<sup>63</sup> Among the Ovidian myths of punished *hybris* mentioned by Dante, it is worth reminding the myth of Phaethon, recalled by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* II, 1-324 and mentioned by Dante in *Inferno* XVII, 106-14, *Purgatorio* VI, 71-72 and XXIX 115-20, and *Paradiso* XVII, 1-6 and XXXI, 124-29. On the figure of Phaethon, see Kevin Brownlee, 'Phaethon's Fall and Dante's Ascent', *Dante Studies*, 102 (1984), 135-44). Another myth of *hybris* significantly reworked in the

the beginning of the second cantica Dante invokes Calliope, referring to the artistic arrogance of the Pierides who were defeated and punished by the Muses, now the author of the *Commedia* is once again depicting himself not as a challenger but as an instrument of the divine.<sup>64</sup> Once again, Dante is reusing mythological figures connected to Parnassus in order to make a metapoetic statement about his own art, which is ultimately at the service of God's will.<sup>65</sup> As the author of the *Commedia* presented himself as an anti-Pierid in *Purgatorio* I, now he is opening the third cantica by picturing himself as an anti-Marsyas.

Over recent years, another interpretation of this passage has taken hold in Dante studies. According to distinguished scholars such as Kevin Brownlee, Paola Rigo, Diskin Clay, Jessica Levenstein and Robert Hollander,<sup>66</sup> the figure of Marsyas should be read in a positive way, by which the satyr's skin is a symbol of an earthly impediment and its removal by flaying is a rebirth, a sort of martyrdom that makes the ascent to Heaven possible. Jessica Levenstein, for example, put the emphasis on the difference between the Ovidian verb *detrahere*, used by Marsyas when Apollo starts flaying him ('quid me mihi detrahis?', *Metamorphoses* VI, 388) and Dante's *trarre* in *Paradiso* I ('come quando Marsia traesti / de la vagina de le membra sue', lines 20-21). In Dante's

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*Commedia* is that of Semele, recalled in *Metamorphoses* III, 273-309 (but also in *Thebaid* III, 183-85) and reused by Dante in *Inferno* XXX, 1-12 and *Paradiso* XXI, 1-12 (see Kevin Brownlee, 'Ovid's Semele and Dante's Metamorphosis: Paradiso 21-22', in *The Poetry of Allusion*, pp. 224-32; Giuseppe Ledda, 'Semele e Narciso: miti ovidiani della visione nella *Commedia* di Dante', in *Le 'Metamorfosi' di Ovidio nella letteratura tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. by Gian Mario Anselmi and Marta Guerra (Bologna: Gedit, 2006) pp. 17-40).

<sup>64</sup> Another myth of specifically artistic *hybris* reused by Dante in the *Commedia* (which involves a deity who, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is connected with Parnassus) is the myth of Aracne, punished by Minerva. The myth is told by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* VI 1-145 and recalled by Dante first in *Inferno* XVII, 18 and then in *Purgatorio* XII, 43-45. On the connection between these three myths of artistic *hybris* (the myths of Aracne, the Pierides and Marsyas) see Giuseppe Ledda, 'Un bestiario metaletterario nell'*Inferno* dantesco', *Studi danteschi. Fondati da Michele Barbi*, 73 (2013), 119-53. I will talk more about this connection in the last part of this chapter.

<sup>65</sup> Sergio Casali ('Apollo e Marsia nel proemio del *Paradiso*') and Giorgio Inglese in his commentary on *Paradiso* I (in Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, ed. by Giorgio Inglese, 3 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 2021)) seem to agree on this interpretation.

<sup>66</sup> See Kevin Brownlee, 'Pauline Vision and Ovidian Speech', pp. 202-13; Paola Rigo, *Memoria classica e memoria biblica*, pp. 119-20; Diskin Clay 'The metamorphosis of Ovid in Dante's *Commedia*', in *Dante: mito e poesia. Atti del Secondo seminario dantesco internazionale (Monte Verità, Ascona, 23-27 giugno 1997)*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone and Tatiana Crivelli (Florence, Cesati, 1999), pp. 69-85 (pp. 80-82); Levenstein, Jessica, 'The re-formation of Marsyas in *Paradiso* I'; Robert Hollander, 'Marsyas as *figura Dantis*: *Paradiso* 1.20', *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America* (2010) <https://www.princeton.edu/~dante/ebdsa/hollander042710.html> [accessed 20 July 2022].

version, claims Levenstein, it is not the skin that is painfully removed from the satyr, leaving him mutilated, but the satyr who is removed from the earthly shell of his skin.<sup>67</sup> According to this reading, Marsyas should not be interpreted as a negative model but as a *figura Dantis*, a symbol of the poet's re-birth at the beginning of the third cantica and of his desire to ascend to (and describe) the realm of God.

If we look at the medieval interpretations of this episode, however, the main reading of the confrontation between Apollo and Marsyas that emerges from Ovidian commentaries is that of an opposition between *sapientia* (represented by the Delphic god) and *insipientia* (represented by the satyr). For example, Arnulf of Orléans comments on the sixth book of the *Metamorphoses*: 'Marsia i. insipientia disputavit cum Apolline i. cum sapientia, sed confutata per sapientiam fuit excoriata. Inspiciens enim a sapiente sibi non potest cavere quin totum quod dicit probetur nichil valere'.<sup>68</sup> The same allegorisation of the myth is re-proposed in the commentary on the *Metamorphoses* by John of Garland ('Certans cum Phebo satyrus notat insipientis / impar certamen cum sapiente trahi').<sup>69</sup> This interpretation seems to support the reading of Marsyas as *hybris*, as a symbol of the foolish arrogance that leads unwise men to challenge the divine, and it allows us to see a parallel between the opening invocation of *Purgatorio* and the beginning of *Paradiso*. The second and the third cantiche would thus start with the same metapoetic statement, with a declaration of submission to the divine (which might also be Dante's own warning to himself) that will guarantee the success of Dante's artistic endeavour, in open contrast with that of the Pierides and Marsyas.

On the other hand, the myth of Daphne that Dante recalls at line 15 with the reference to 'l'amato alloro' and then again at line 25 ('diletto legno') and lines 32-33 ('fronda / peneia'), is a less unusual choice to open the third cantica, less 'problematic' and more commented on by medieval exegetes, but equally rich in terms of interpretations and metapoetic implications.<sup>70</sup> The myth is borrowed by Dante from the first book of the *Metamorphoses* (lines 452-567), where Ovid describes

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<sup>67</sup> See Levenstein, 'The reformation of Marsyas', pp. 410-11.

<sup>68</sup> *Allegorie super Ovidii Metamorphosin* VI, 16.

<sup>69</sup> *Integumenta super Ovidium Metamorphoseos* VI, 283-84.

<sup>70</sup> For an overview of the medieval interpretations of the myth of Daphne and the laurel, see Mary E. Barnard, 'The Christianization of the Myth of Spollo and Daphne in Ovid's Medieval Commentators', in Mary E. Barnard, *The Myth of Apollo and Daphne from Ovid to Quevedo: Love, Agon and the Grotesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), pp. 44-81.

how Apollo, struck by Cupid's arrow on Mount Parnassus, fell in love with the nymph Daphne.<sup>71</sup> The nymph, in the attempt to escape the god, asks for the help of his father, the river Peneus, who turned her into a laurel before Apollo could reach her. In the name of his love, the god decided to make the laurel his sacred plant and used it to adorn his head and his lyre. The myth is reported in Hyginus' *Fabulae*, Fulgentius' *Mythologiarum libri tres* and in all the Vatican Mythographers.<sup>72</sup>

During the Middle Ages, the myth was mainly read according to the widespread interpretation of Apollo as *sapientia*. Fumo shows that in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Apollo's blind love for Daphne was used as an element of ambiguity, a way to represent Apollo in a human, undivine, and anti-Augustan way.<sup>73</sup> This aspect does not survive in medieval Ovidian commentaries. The erotic agon between Apollo and Daphne is sublimated and interpreted in a moral and theological way. Daphne becomes a symbol of chastity, Apollo's love for the nymph becomes, allegorically, the desire of the wise Christian for beatitude. In Arnulf of Orléans' reading of the myth, Daphne is identified as virginity and the laurel becomes the symbol of the heavenly reward for chastity:

Sed Cupido eum arcu sagittat id est stimulis carnis sue eum calefizat. Sed tamen ille [Apollo] non amat nisi virginem Danem, quam tamen consequi non potest donec ea sit mutata in laurum. Virgines enim de virginitate sua in hoc seculo non merentur coronam nisi post suam mutationem id est post mortem eam accipiunt. Sed tunc habent lauream coronam quam in hac vita meruentur. Dane ideo filia Penei dei flucii fingitur quia aqua est frigida, et pudicitia est filia frigiditatis sicut impudicitia caloris.  
(*Allegoriae super Ovidii Metamorphosen*, I, 9)

The commentary of Giovanni del Virgilio reports the same connection between the laurel and chastity,<sup>74</sup> while, with a small variation, in John of Garland's *Integumenta* the laurel is presented as a symbol of wisdom that good men should desire and aim at:

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<sup>71</sup> This episode happens right after Apollo's slaying of Python. According to Ovid, Apollo, proud of his victory against the serpent, mocked Cupid saying that he was not worthy of using a bow and arrows. With the same arrows, the god of love hit Apollo and made him fall in love with Daphne (*Metamorphoses* I, 452-567).

<sup>72</sup> Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 203; Fulgentius, *Mythologiarum libri tres*, I, XIV; *Mythographus Vaticanus* I, II, 116; II, 23; III, 8, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Fumo, *The Legacy of Apollo*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>74</sup> *Allegoriae librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos* (I, 9): 'Per Phebum intelligo pudicam personam et castam, per Daphnem ipsam pudicitiam quam insequitur casta persona. Per Danem converti in arborem intelligo quod pudicitia radicatur in corde illius qui insequitur eam. Per laurum signatur virginitas eo quod semper est virens et redolens'.

Mentibus hec arbor sapientium virgo virescit  
que quamvis fugiat victa labore viret.  
Est virgo Phebi sapientia facta corona  
laurus, quam cupida mente requirit homo. (*Integumenta Ovidii* I, 93-96)

In the French *Ovide moralisé* from the early fourteenth-century, Daphne is still presented as connected with chastity and as a symbol of the good Christian who tries to resist earthly passions. On the other side, however, Apollo is also represented as the wise man who has to face the allurements of earthly beauty. Daphne's transformation into the laurel becomes an attempt to destroy her beauty and, therefore, to fight moral corruption.<sup>75</sup>

These allegorising interpretations must have been quite familiar to Dante but, as with the myth of Marsyas, the metapoetic component of the story of Apollo and Daphne cannot be underestimated. In his *Etymologiarum libri*, Isidore connects the word *laurus* with *laudis*, underlining the relationship between the laurel and glory (in this case, military glory): 'Laurus a verbo laudis dicta; hac enim cum laudibus victorum capita coronabantur'.<sup>76</sup> What Dante is seeking, at the beginning of *Paradiso*, is the poetic glory derived by the celebration of God. The moral and theological implications of the laurel, as a symbol of wisdom and spiritual reward, are still present but in the context of a very precise metapoetic statement. Dante asks Apollo to make him 'degnò' of the laurel not only from a spiritual but also from a poetic point of view. For Dante, the two things go together. There is no space here to fully explore Dante's contribution to the development of the *topos* of poetic crowning, which will then be extensively reworked by Petrarch and other Renaissance writers and artists.<sup>77</sup> When in his *Genealogiae* Boccaccio comments on the myth of Daphne, he already interprets the laurel as a symbol of glory (and especially poetic glory) but this

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<sup>75</sup> *Ovide moralisé* I, 2857-3027; 3241-44; 3246-49.

<sup>76</sup> *Etymologiarum libri* XVII, VII, 2.

<sup>77</sup> On the re-elaboration of the motif of poetic crowning in Dante, see Enrico Malato, 'L'"amato alloro" di Dante: il miraggio della incoronazione poetica. Una proposta per il settecentenario', in Enrico Malato, *Nuovi studi su Dante. Lecturae Dantis, note e chiose dantesche*, ed. by Andrea Mazzucchi, Massimiliano Corrado, Antonio Marzo (Cittadella: Bertonecello Artigrafiche, 2020), pp. 386-406. For the evolution of this image from Dante to Boccaccio, see Michelangelo Picone, 'Il tema dell'incoronazione poetica in Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio', *L'Alighieri. Rassegna dantesca*, 25 (2005), 5-26.

idea, that is so familiar to us, must not be taken for granted.<sup>78</sup> It is important to note that, by referring to the myth of Apollo and Daphne, Dante is not only reproposing the allegorical interpretation of medieval commentators; the power of the metaphor of the laurel resides in his connection with Apollo as god of Parnassus and the aspiration to the ‘fronda peneia’ is strictly connected to Dante’s poetic endeavour.

On this matter, namely the interpretation of the figure of Apollo himself, of his role in the opening of *Paradiso* and of his relationship to his pagan background, the main tendency among Dante scholars is to consider him in Christian terms as an allegory for God. Some ancient commentators on the *Commedia*, such as Iacomo della Lana and Francesco da Buti, already agreed on this interpretation: ‘E benchè secondo la lettera invochi Appolline; secondo l’allegoria invoca Iddio; imperò che li Poeti, invocando le grazie e le virtù, le invocano sotto vari nomi, e fingono che quelli siano iddii’ (on *Paradiso* I, 13-36). In recent times, this Christian allegorical reading of the figure of Apollo in the first canto of *Paradiso* has found many supporters, such as Giorgio Padoan, Robert Hollander and Enrico Malato, who claims that, in the context of the invocations, both Apollo and the Muses ‘sono simboli della grazia divina, sia pure in “gradi” diversi’.<sup>79</sup>

It is certainly true that Dante’s Apollo in *Paradiso* I presents some very Christian traits. The adjective ‘buono’, which introduces the figure of the god at line 13, was the adjective typically associated with Christ, and the epithet ‘padre’ at line 28 clearly points in the direction of Christian imagery. Similarly, as Hollander notes, the word ‘valor’ at line 14 (that is also recalled a few lines later with the expression ‘divina virtù’) is used thrice again in the *Commedia*, always in relation to the power of God.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, as many scholars rightly point out, line 14 (‘fammi del tuo valor sì fatto vaso’) strongly recalls biblical language, with an explicit reference to the figure of St. Paul, the *vas electionis* whom Dante identifies as one of the models for his journey in the afterworld (and in Heaven, in particular).<sup>81</sup> This allegorical characterisation of the figure of Apollo at the beginning of

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<sup>78</sup> *Genealogiae deorum gentilium* VII, 29.

<sup>79</sup> Enrico Malato, “Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda”. Chiosa a *Par.* I, 34-36’ in Enrico Malato, *Nuovi studi su Dante*, pp. 364-85 (p. 377). See also Giorgio Padoan, ‘Apollo’, in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, I (1970), 318, Hollander, ‘Dante’s Nine Invocations Revisited’, and Ledda, ‘Invocazioni e preghiere’, p.130/141.

<sup>80</sup> *Paradiso* I, 107; X, 3; XXXIII, 81. See Hollander’s commentary on *Paradiso* I, 13-25. The scholar also notes how Apollo is not only described as ‘buono’, like Christ, and powerful (‘tuo valor’), like the Father. He is also depicted in the act of *spirare*, like the Holy Spirit, thus presenting the characteristics of all the elements of the Trinity (see Hollander, *Il prologo alla terza cantica*).

<sup>81</sup> See Act 9, 15. Dante mentions St. Paul as a ‘vaso’ in *Inferno* II, 28 (‘lo Vas d’elezione’) and in *Paradiso* XXI, 127-28. On the use of Pauline lexicon in this specific passage of *Paradiso* see, among others, Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante’s*

the third cantica seems perfectly consistent with the progressive ‘Christianisation’ of the invocations of the *Commedia*, particularly stressed by Robert Hollander in his analysis of this specific kind of prayer in Dante’s poem. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the American scholar reflects on the fact that the Muses invoked by Dante in the first two cantiche gradually acquire stronger Christian connotations and he maintains that the poet eventually rejects them in *Paradiso*, where the invocations (with the exception of *Paradiso* XVIII) are all addressed to different and more powerful entities: a Christ-like Apollo, the stars and God himself.

This figural reading of Apollo would not have been a novelty in the Middle Ages, when the allegorical equivalence between Apollo and Christ is quite common. This identification, based on Apollo’s relationship with the sun, the art of healing and the concepts of philosophy and wisdom, appears to be well-established at Dante’s time. In the twelfth century, Arnulf of Orléans establishes the basis for the medieval interpretation of Apollo as the god of light who prevails over the forces of darkness. In his commentary on the *Metamorphoses*, Arnulf reflects on the myth of Apollo and Python, recalled by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* I, 416-51 (namely right before the episode of Daphne).

The story of the agon between Apollo and the serpent Python is ancient and dates back to the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, from the fourth century BC.<sup>82</sup> According to the myth, the dragon used to live on Mount Parnassus and guarded the oracle of Delphi before the advent of Apollo. He was then killed by the Olympian god, who took possession of the oracle and chose to reside on the sacred mountain.<sup>83</sup> For a medieval reader, the potential overlap between the figure of Python and the biblical image of the serpent as an embodiment of sin, evil and earthly seductions was quite easy. In Arnulf of Orléans’ commentary, Python represents deceit and false belief, defeated by Apollo who figures the light of wisdom:

Per Pithonem noxium terre humorem habemus quem sol sagittis id est radiis suis  
desiccat. Vel Pithon est falsa credulitas, quam Apollo id est sapiens ratione sua  
exterminat. Apollo enim exterminans interpretatur: exterminate enim et dividit

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‘*Commedia*’; Kevin Brownlee, ‘Pauline Vision and Ovidian Speech in *Paradiso* I’; Giuseppe Ledda, ‘Invocazioni e preghiere’, pp. 134-35. On the Dante’s practice of correcting pagan myths with Pauline images see also Giuseppe Ledda, *Dante* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), especially Chapter 7 (*Memoria biblica e memoria classica nella ‘Commedia’*, pp. 99-119).

<sup>82</sup> *Homeric Hymns* III, 353-74.

<sup>83</sup> For an analysis of the origin and meaning of this myth, see Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), pp. 13-22.

tenebras per lucem. Sic et sapiens falsam credulitatem exterminat a veritate, vel etiam fallaciam que potest haberi per Pithonem serpentem fallacem'. (*Allegoriae super Ovidii Metamorphosen* I, 8)

The same interpretation of Apollo-sun as wisdom and truth, and of Python as false belief, can also be found in Fulgentius' *Mythologiarum libri tres* (I, 17). Apollo thus becomes the champion of truth and virtue who prevails over deceit, reproposing the biblical motif of the battle between good and evil and creating a direct link with the image of the good Christian as a warrior fighting the forces of darkness.<sup>84</sup>

The same idea of Apollo as a sort of militant Christ reappears in the commentaries on the *Metamorphoses* by John of Garland and Giovanni del Virgilio, who both interpret the combat between the god and the serpent as a metaphor for the battle between deceit and wisdom.<sup>85</sup> However, the most explicit juxtaposition between Apollo and Christ is probably in the fourteenth-century *Ovide Moralisé*. Here, Apollo is typologically represented as *figura Christi* and described, using biblical lexicon, as the sun which illuminates mankind ('solauz qui tout home enlumine', 3223), the healer of all sicknesses ('Mires qui set toutes le cures / [...] / qui puet tout malade et tout mort / saner et resourdre de mort', 3227-30) and the incarnation of divine wisdom ('[Dieus] fist sa sapience descender / en terre et char humaine prendre / [...] / pour nous garir et delivrer / de mort et de l'infernal cage', 3313-17).

These interpretations of the figure of Apollo, which emerge quite clearly from medieval texts (and from Ovidian commentaries in particular), were probably familiar to Dante as well. The god that he addresses at the beginning of the third cantica and that is presented as the patron of the poetry of *Paradiso* definitely has some strong Christian connotations. Such a juxtaposition would not have been surprising for a medieval reader. However, in the context of Dante's *Commedia*, a purely typological interpretation of this classical figure might appear reductive. In order to

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<sup>84</sup> In her study of the reception of the myth of Apollo and Daphne, Mary Barnard clearly shows the steps of the progressive Christianisation of Apollo during the Middle Ages, tracing the history of the medieval interpretation of Apollonian myths (and of the myth of Python in particular). See Mary E. Barnard, 'The Christianization of the Myth of Apollo and Daphne'. Barnard also explains how these medieval and moral interpretations of Apollo paradoxically restored Apollo's dignity which had been denied by Ovid with his representations of the god as fallible and a slave to his own passions (see p. 53).

<sup>85</sup> See John of Garland, *Integumenta super Ovidium Metamorphoseos* I, 93-96; Giovanni del Virgilio, *Allegoriae librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos* I, 8.

understand the metapoetic role of Apollo at this point of the poem we cannot read him in purely Christological terms. Like the myths of Marsyas and Daphne – re-used by Dante in this invocation in order to make specific poetic claims – the efficacy of the figure of Apollo at the beginning of the third cantic lies in his capacity to convey a precise message about Dante's poetry.

As Fumo's study shows, the Middle Ages preserve the idea of Apollo as a metapoetic device connected with problems of exegesis and poetic authority, a 'poetic proxy' used by medieval authors 'as an aspect of their own hermeneutic self-image'.<sup>86</sup> This happens for Dante as well. The connection between Apollo and the sun made him not only a symbol of wisdom, engaged in the fight against darkness and moral deceit, but also the god of prophetic enlightenment and, in a very similar way, of literary exegesis. In Chapter 1, I discussed the medieval association between Apollo and the exegetical process, based on the idea of the sun's rays that penetrate the obscure meaning of a text, and I showed the ongoing reflection on the relationship between poetry, prophecy and interpretation fostered by Parnassian elements in the last cantos of Purgatory. The invocation of *Paradiso* I must also be read as the end point of a discourse about poetry that started in the middle of the second cantic and was developed in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise. With the first and the last references to Parnassus (in *Purgatorio* XXII and *Paradiso* I), Dante starts and concludes a very precise metapoetic thought. The allusions to Parnassian images in *Purgatorio* XXII and in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise guide the readers of the *Commedia* through a careful reflection on the potentially prophetic content of pagan poetry, signaling the importance of the right interpretation and recontextualisation of certain texts that – if read with the right tools – can reveal Christian truths. Now, at the beginning of his 'ultimo lavoro', though still at the top of the mountain of Purgatory, Dante concludes that line of reflection. By staging the third cantic under the poetic, prophetic and hermeneutical influence of Apollo, he is suggesting that the poetry of *Paradiso* no longer needs to be decodified. He is making a clear statement about himself as an author which definitively defines his poetic identity. The meaning of his words is in plain view, there is no veil between him and his readers at this point. Poetry and prophecy finally coincide, without the need for an interpretive mediation.

In order to understand the importance of this invocation for Dante's reflection on the poetry of the *Commedia*, it is necessary to analyse the figure of Apollo taking into account not only his Christian connotations (which are certainly strong in this passage) but also his relationship with the classical world. The metapoetic importance of this passage of the poem resides in the synthesis

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<sup>86</sup> Fumo, *The Legacy of Apollo*, p. 77.

between classical and biblical elements that converge in the figure of Apollo. In the course of the previous chapter, I showed the topographical and conceptual similarities between Dante's Eden and the classical image of Parnassus, reflecting on Dante's syncretism and on how Parnassian elements and myths are replaced by Dante within a new hermeneutical landscape in order to shape his own idea of poetry. The invocation to Apollo of *Paradiso* I, with its reference to Parnassus, constitutes the arrival point of the re-elaboration of that mythological unit and of its integration in the framework of the *Commedia*.

In an essay from 2009 (already cited in the course of this thesis), Claudia Villa reflects on the opening of *Paradiso* I and *Paradiso* II and on Dante's reuse of pagan deities and myths connected to poetry in this delicate passage of the poem. Villa claims that, at this point, Dante can depict pagan figures such as Apollo as allies 'perché, con accorto disegno, [...] aveva già rivisitato i miti fondamentali del Parnaso, per trasferire in immagine un suo discorso critico, sotteso ad ogni cantica'.<sup>87</sup> It is exactly in these terms that we should look at the last reference to Parnassus in the poem as the conclusion of a process of re-elaboration of metapoetic myths that is not unsystematic, confused or casual but, on the contrary, intentional and carefully thought through. With this thesis, I have aimed to show the steps of this process of re-elaboration and appropriation, which is fundamental in order to understand Dante's relationship with pagan texts and his new – Christian – poetic project.

#### 4.5 MINERVA, APOLLO AND THE MUSES: PARNASSIAN GODS IN *PARADISO* II

To conclude this reflection on Dante's assimilation of Parnassian myths and tropes, which is developed in the cantos of the Earthly Paradise and presented as successfully concluded at the beginning of the third cantica, I will offer some brief observations on the *incipit* of *Paradiso* II. The second canto of *Paradiso* constitutes a sort of second introduction to the cantica.<sup>88</sup> If in the opening of *Paradiso* I Dante declares the subject of his third cantica and states the necessity of an increased poetic effort in order to represent the realm of God, now he talks directly to his readers in order to stress the absolute novelty (and intellectual difficulty) of his 'materia':

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<sup>87</sup> Villa, 'Corona, mitria, alloro e cappello', p. 184.

<sup>88</sup> For some useful studies on *Paradiso* II, see Alberto Chiari, 'Il preludio del *Paradiso*. Canti I e II', in Alberto Chiari, *Saggi danteschi e altri studi (1980-1990)* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1991), pp. 42-53; Michelangelo Picone, 'Canto II', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*, III. *Paradiso* (2002), pp. 35-53; Bruno Basile, 'Canto II. La luna e l'ordine divino del cosmo', in *Lectura Dantis Romana*, III.1 *Paradiso. Canti I-XVII* (2015), 61-84.

O voi che siete in piccioletta barca,  
 desiderosi d'ascoltar, seguiti  
 dietro al mio legno che cantando varca,  
 tornate a riveder li vostri liti:  
 non vi mettete in pelago, ché forse,  
 perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti.  
 L'acqua ch'io prendo già mai non si corse;  
 Minerva spira, e conducemi Apollo,  
 e nove Muse mi dimostran l'Orse.  
 Voialtri pochi che drizzaste il collo  
 per tempo al pan de li angeli, del quale  
 vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo,  
 metter potete ben per l'alto sale  
 vostro navigio, servando mio solco  
 dinanzi a l'acqua che ritorna eguale.  
 Que' glorïosi che passaro al Colco  
 non s'ammiraron come voi farete,  
 quando Iasón vider fatto bifolco. (*Paradiso* II, 1-18)

Dante opens his address to the readers with a nautical metaphor, warning those who might find themselves (morally and intellectually) in a 'piccioletta barca' to go back to the shore, since they will not be able to follow his 'legno che cantando varca' in the open water. A similar metaphor was used by Dante to open the second cantica of his poem when he referred to the 'navicella del mio ingegno' which 'per correr miglior acque alza le vele' after the cruel ocean of *Inferno* (*Purgatorio* I, 1-3).<sup>89</sup> The comparison between the act of sailing and the act of writing, often associated with the opening or the conclusion of a poem, an entire piece work or some specific narrative sections, has a long literary history, and sailing images with metapoetic implications can be found in the works

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<sup>89</sup> The same image is used by Dante in another *incipit* outside the *Commedia*, namely the beginning of the second book of the *Convivio* (II, 1): 'lo tempo chiama e domanda la mia nave uscir di porto; per che, dirizzato l'artimone della ragione all'ora del mio desiderio, entro in pelago con isperanza di dolce cammino e di salutevole porto e laudabile nella fine della mia cena'. For some observations on Dante's use of nautical metaphor in the *Commedia* see Paola Allegretti, 'Argo "dietro al mio legno che cantando varca"', *Studi danteschi*, 69 (2004), 185-209.

of Ovid, Virgil and Statius.<sup>90</sup> Scholars have analysed how this address to the readers is developed between two opposite models of navigation, the negative model of Ulysses (whose ‘orazion picciola’ is here recalled) and the positive model of the Argonauts (mentioned at lines 16-18).<sup>91</sup> What is relevant for this study on Parnassian images in the *Commedia* is that in the middle of this highly metapoetic passage, in which Dante sets the coordinates for reading the third cantica of his poem and clearly defines his role as an author, he mentions, once again and all together, Apollo, Minerva and the Muses: ‘Minerva spira, e conducemi Apollo, / e nove Muse mi dimostran l’Orse’ (lines 8-9).

In line with his reading of *Paradiso* I and of the system of the invocations in general, Robert Hollander sees in this triptych an allusion to the Christian Trinity. In his interpretation of the passage, Minerva’s act of *spirare* would be a reference to the Holy Spirit, Apollo would be identified as the Son (in accordance with certain medieval allegories) and the Muses would represent the Father, creator of the nine heavenly spheres.<sup>92</sup> However, I believe that, despite the Christian traits that these deities acquire over the course of the poem, their presence in *Paradiso* II – and the way Dante depicts them – has much wider implications for the poetry of the last cantica. In the course of this thesis, I have analysed the Muses, Minerva and Apollo as all connected to Parnassus and to different lines of reflection that this specific mythological imagery fosters within the *Commedia*. These are the deities that follow Dante’s considerations about poetic inspiration, wisdom, prophecy and Christian truth. In the course of the *Commedia*, they bring together classical and Christian elements, becoming the symbol of Dante’s appropriation of the classical tools of poetry. These are the mythological figures who, as mentioned in Chapter 3, appear together in Horace’s *Ars poetica*

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<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV, 176-177; *Ars amatoria* I, 769-770. The *Fasti* are particularly rich in relation to this (see *Fasti* I, 1-6; II, 1-4; III, 790; IV 17-18; IV 729-30). For Virgil, see *Georgics* IV, 116-122, while Statius uses the metaphor in *Silvae* IV, 4, 87-92 and *Thebaid* XII, 890-891. Similar images can be found in Propertius as well (*Elegies* III, 17, 1-2). Ernst Robert Curtius, in his *European Literature*, provides a wide range of examples for this specific metaphor (see the chapter ‘Metaforica’, pp. 147-50).

<sup>91</sup> On Dante’s dialogue with these two myths in *Paradiso* II, see Piero Boitani, ‘Dall’ombra di Ulisse all’ombra di Argo’, in *Dante. Mito e Poesia*, pp. 207-226, and the aforementioned Paola Allegretti, ‘Argo “dietro al mio legno che cantando varca”’. For some more specific observations on Dante’s reuse of the myth of the Argonauts in this particular canto and in the *Commedia* in general, see Michelangelo Picone, ‘Dante argonauta. La ricezione dei miti ovidiani nella *Commedia*’, in *Ovidius redivivus. Von Ovid zu Dante*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone and Bernhard Zimmermann (Stuttgart: M. und P. Verlag, 1994), pp. 173-202; Michelangelo Picone, ‘Canto II’.

<sup>92</sup> Hollander, ‘Dante’s nine invocations revisited’, pp. 18-19. Hollander also points to some antecedents for this interpretation, such as the commentaries of Landino, Gelli and, in more recent times, Carroll.

and are described as necessary for the art of poetry: ‘Tu nihil invita dices faciesve Minerva; / [...] ne forte pudori / sit tibi Musa lyrae sollers et cantor Apollo’ (*Ars poetica*, 385-407).

Perhaps it is not by chance that, as Ledda notes, these are also the gods who are involved in the fight against artistic *hybris* in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.<sup>93</sup> While the Muses beat the Pierides and Apollo punishes Marsyas, Minerva is responsible for the transformation of Arachne, the young woman who dared to challenge the goddess in a weaving contest.<sup>94</sup> These figures are so closely intertwined in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* that they really appear as part of the same mythological unit.<sup>95</sup> The fact that they are all presented as allies in *Paradiso* II reflects Dante’s confidence that his poetry is destined to succeed as an instrument of the divine

Given the clear recontextualisation and partial Christianisation of these deities, we must also consider these Parnassian figures as the symbol of a reflection on poetry that begins in (and on) pagan texts and shapes the poetry of the *Commedia* from the inside, as Dante gradually reworks and assimilates classical tropes, engaging in a dialogue with his literary antecedents. In the garden of Eden, on the top of Mount Purgatory, Dante becomes ready to earn a new kind of poetic glory with a new kind of poetry. At the beginning of *Paradiso*, staging his third cantica under the patronage of Apollo, he declares the final (and explicit) connection between poetry and prophecy, the one that classical poets could not fully achieve. The presence of Apollo, Minerva and the Muses in *Paradiso* II, kindly watching over Dante’s poetic journey, proves that the re-elaboration and reformation of Parnassian myths and tropes is now concluded. In the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, Dante develops a series of considerations on the relationship between pagan poetry and Christian truth, carefully guided by imagery connected to the classical mountain of poetry. In this reflection and in this comparison, he defines his own role as a reader of pagan texts and as a writer of Christian poetry. Now that that process is complete, he can finally start singing the realm of God,

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<sup>93</sup> Giuseppe Ledda, ‘Un bestiario metaletterario nell’*Inferno* dantesco’, *Studi danteschi. Fondati da Michele Barbi*, 73 (2013), 119-53 (pp. 145-46), repr. in Giuseppe Ledda, *Il bestiario dell’aldilà. Gli animali nella ‘Commedia’ di Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2019), pp. 129-54.

<sup>94</sup> See *Metamorphoses* VI, 1-145. Dante recalls this episode in *Purgatorio* XII, 43-45, mentioning Arachne as an *exemplum* of punished pride.

<sup>95</sup> I already mentioned how the episode of Marsyas starts when he finds the flute, invented by Minerva to celebrate Perseus’ victory over the Gorgon. It is still Minerva who goes to Mount Helicon to see the spring Hippocrene, giving the Muses the occasion to tell the story of the poetic contest against the Pierides. Finally, according to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, it is after this episode that Minerva, reflecting on the fairness of the Pierides’ punishment, decided to correct Arachne’s pride. (*Metamorphoses* VI, 1-145).

escorted by ‘nove Muse’, the goddesses of poetic inspiration, who – perhaps not by chance – are ‘nine’ but also ‘new’.

## CONCLUSION

Nonne vides quanti negotii susceperis: scandere per ardua deserta Parnasi et inaccessum Musarum nemus? Video, dilectissimi domini, video, inquam, Romani cives, hec omnia ‘sed me Parnasi deserta per ardua dulcis / raptat amor’, ut, incipiens, dixi; cuius amoris tanta vis est apud me ut per eum omnes has difficultates, quantum ad presens propositum meum spectat, aut vicerim, aut vicisse michi videar.

(Francesco Petrarca, *Collatio laureationis*, 5, 5-6)

In 1341 Petrarch was crowned poet laureate in Rome and delivered an oration (the so-called *Collatio laureationis*) which soon became the manifesto of a new era. Starting with a quotation from Virgil’s *Georgics* (‘sed me Parnasi deserta per ardua dulcis / raptat amor’)<sup>96</sup>, Petrarch depicts himself as the poet who re-opened the path to the peak of Mount Parnassus, desert and forsaken since classical antiquity. He centres his speech on the idea of the arduous ascent of the mountain of poetry, developing a series of metaphors that were amply reused by contemporary and later authors to describe the European renaissance of the *studia humanitatis*. The image of Parnassus thus becomes the symbol of a renewed love for poetry, of the reconnection with classical Latin authors, of the aspiration to poetic fame, of a cultural *renovatio*. It becomes, to use Elisabeth Schröter’s words, an ‘epochal term’ for the Humanism.<sup>97</sup>

However, the metaphorical system built by Petrarch, which defines the role of poetry in the Renaissance period, has its roots in Dante’s *Commedia*. Some scholars have rightly pointed at *Paradiso* I, 25-27<sup>98</sup> and *Paradiso* XXV, 7-9<sup>99</sup> as antecedents to the humanistic motif of poetic coronation.<sup>100</sup> This dissertation, however, has shown that Dante’s contribution to the re-

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<sup>96</sup> *Georgics* III, 291-93.

<sup>97</sup> Schröter, ‘Parnassus’, col. 304.

<sup>98</sup> ‘vedra’mi al piè del tuo diletto legno / venire, e coronarmi de le foglie / che la materia e tu mi farai degno’.

<sup>99</sup> ‘con altra voce omai, con altro vello / ritornerò poeta, e in sul fonte / del mio battesimo prenderò ’l cappello’.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Michelangelo Picone, ‘Il tema dell’incoronazione poetica in Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio’, *L’Alighieri. Rassegna dantesca*, 25 (2005), 5-26, and Lorenzo Geri, ‘Il ritorno delle Muse e la via del Parnaso. Metafora della rinascita tra Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio’, in *Per civile conversazione: con Amedeo Quondam*, ed. by Beatrice Alfonzetti, Guido Baldassarri, Eraldo Bellini, Simona Costa and Marco Santagata (Rome: Bulzoni, 2015), pp. 617-31.

elaboration of Parnassian imagery goes far beyond those two passages of *Paradiso* and involves a series of mechanisms that are much more complex than it appears at first sight. The analysis of the allusions to Parnassian myths, figures and tropes in the *Commedia* has revealed a carefully designed system of references – a map, we might say – which guides the reader along two main lines of reflection.

Firstly, the occurrence of Parnassian images in the *Commedia* signals the presence of an ongoing dialogue between Dante and his classical Latin models, and clarifies the modalities of this interaction, centred on the concepts of integration and assimilation. The references to Parnassus (carefully placed at certain junctures of the poem) mark the different stages of Dante's appropriation and recontextualisation of pagan literature within a new Christian framework. By reworking Parnassian *topoi* and myths, Dante carries out a series of reflections on the relationships between writing and reading, poetry and prophecy, poetic fame and Christian beatitude. Recognising and analysing the steps of this process not only clarifies the complex and multi-faceted relationship between the 'sacred poem' and pagan literature, but also offers a unique perspective on Dante's construction of his own authorial identity.

Secondly, this research has shown that the resemantisation of Parnassian imagery in the *Commedia* mainly happens in the liminal space of the Earthly Paradise. The strong presence of Parnassian references in these cantos confirms the metapoetic importance of the last section of *Purgatorio*, which marks the passage from the earthly to the heavenly part of Dante's journey and introduces the final stage of his poetic evolution. Furthermore, the subtle but constant presence of Parnassian images in this part of the poem creates a series of connections between Parnassian and Edenic landscapes, suggesting a potential overlap between these two places – or rather these two concepts – in Dante's mind. Therefore, Dante's use of Parnassian imagery in the *Commedia* is revealed not only as the recontextualisation of a metaphorical system but also as the appropriation of an idea. In the cantos of the Earthly Paradise, the Christian path to Heaven and the classical aspiration to poetic glory (represented by Parnassus) seem to converge, forming two sides of the same coin. In Dante's perspective, one journey contains and orients the other one. When the Renaissance poets further elaborate the idea of Parnassus, making it the symbol of a new literary sensitivity, they work – more or less consciously – on a classical concept that Dante has already brought into a new era.

This study of the re-elaboration of Parnassian imagery could and should be developed in two main directions. The examination of Dante's reuse of Parnassian myths and tropes should be expanded so as to include passages of the *Commedia* that do not contain an explicit mention of the

mountain of poetry (such as some of the invocations to the Muses) but still belong to the same mythological and metapoetic unit. Furthermore, an analysis of the presence of Parnassian imagery outside the *Commedia* (especially in the *Eclogues*) would help us understand the different phases of Dante's reworking of this cluster of myths and tropes. At the same time, this research should be extended to the Renaissance period. Starting with an examination of the works of Petrarch and Boccaccio, this investigation would be aimed at understanding how the image of Parnassus is further reworked in the fourteenth century, what changes take place from one generation to the next one and how these changes are the reflection of a different intellectual formation.

As is now evident, studying the re-elaboration of Parnassian elements is extremely useful to understand the poetics of an author. As a symbol of poetry itself, the image of Parnassus has always brought forward a reflection about art which reveals the system of values of a certain era. Expanding this research would allow to trace the history of an idea and to understand the development of the concept of poetry in the passage between the Middle Ages and the modern era. While this dissertation has offered an analysis of the first stages of this process by studying the dialogue between the *Commedia* and classical texts from a new perspective, I hope it also sets the basis for further reflection on the image of Parnassus within and outside Dante's *oeuvre*.

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