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DISCOURSES OF MOURNING  
IN DANTE, PETRARCH, AND  
PROUST

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*For Olivia Cooper*



## **Abstract.**

### **Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust**

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DPhil, Trinity Term 2013

This thesis interpolates medieval and modern authors and theorists, namely Dante, Petrarch, and Proust on the one hand, and Freud, Kristeva, and Derrida on the other. I propose that these writers are intimately connected and differentiated by their meditations on grief and loss. I compare, confront, and contrast these narratives of mourning in a discursive shuttling to and fro between medieval and modern, French and Italian, and literature and theory, in order to delineate the specificities of different forms of melancholia as legible in Dante's *Commedia*, Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, and Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and as illuminated by Freudian melancholia, Kristeva's *Soleil noir*, and Derrida's concept of 'demi-deuil'. I challenge the homogeny of the modern concept of melancholia and juxtapose it with the medieval sin of *acedia* in Dante (*Inferno* VII) and Petrarch (considering both the *Secretum* and the *Canzoniere*). From the examples of the treatment of the myth of Orpheus and the book of Lamentations, I argue that discourses of mourning are trapped in a fruitful tension between a desire for uniqueness or originality and a desire for legibility or the comfort of communality. In Girardian terms, I define literary representations of mourning as 'mimetic', that is, caught in a web of intertextual imitation and preoccupations of genre and tradition which are at odds with a quest for new forms of writing. Finally, I contend that the relationship between content and form is particularly close in grief-stricken texts, and characterise my chosen primary texts – including Dante's *Vita nuova* – according to the twin poles of endlessness (which I equate with melancholia) and finitude (the teleological, closed nature of the work of mourning), with a Derridean alternative of unstable oscillation between the two ('demi-deuil').



## **Extended abstract.**

### **Discourses of Mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust**

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DPhil, Trinity Term 2013

My thesis begins with the basic premise that the writings of these three authors are linked by a shared engagement with the experience of loss, most notably through the death of the beloved lady (Beatrice, Laura, Albertine) which is postulated as being central – structurally and emotionally – to Dante’s *Vita nuova*, Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* (the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*), and Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Alongside these three writers, I introduce three theorists, Freud, Kristeva, and Derrida, whose writings are essential to this project for their respective reflections on and definitions of melancholia. In brief, Freud in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (written in 1915 and published in 1917) first associates melancholia with unconscious loss and guilt and places it in a dialectical relationship with the work of mourning. Kristeva, in *Soleil noir* (1987), remains largely within a Freudian framework although importantly she draws attention to the impact melancholia has on language, and conversely, the effect language can have on the experience of loss. Lastly, in a variety of texts and interviews from the late twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, Derrida collapses the Freudian bipolarity of mourning and melancholia in favour of a form of melancholic attachment which he calls ‘demi-deuil’ and which is predicated upon an unstable oscillation between self and other, life and death, forgetfulness and memory, speech and silence, uniqueness and generality, and so on. I place these different melancholic stances in turn in dialogue with the literary representations of grief propounded by Dante, Petrarch, and Proust.

In essence I find psychoanalytical and literary theory vital on the one hand for its patient attention to language and on the other for its postulation of useful terminologies and

frameworks which add not only rigour and clarity but also complexity and ambiguity to readings of texts and authors. Ultimately, I consider literature and theory not only compatible but in fact inextricable since, particularly in the case of my six carefully chosen authors, every text is the product of an 'I' who is both a reader and a writer and is faced with similar problems of how to react to, generalise, and represent loss. Against this asserted commensurability of literature and theory, I am attentive not only to points of overwhelming consonance (in the case of Petrarch and Kristeva, for instance) but also to a nuanced delineation of divergence within overall harmony, which is found to be particularly necessary when confronting Dante with Freud, and Freud with Dante.

My approach, defined in the Introduction, is that of an interpolation of medieval and modern texts, which springs from an eschewing of the rhetoric of modernity in favour of a more nuanced and less triumphal investigation into what characterises these three authors as, to varying extents, both modern and medieval. In this focus on ambiguity and inbetween-ness, I propose the concept of the modieval as a way of representing this embedding of the medieval within the modern, and vice versa. I also seek to refine the definition of 'comparative literature' to encompass what I would prefer to consider as 'contrastive readings', that is, readings of both literary and theoretical texts which are alive to difference and heterogeneity. While the pinpointing of similitude and consonance has an undisputed role to play in the synchronised reading of texts, I open up an explicit space for the elaboration of telling dissonance.

In Chapter One I read Dante's *Commedia* in the light of Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia'. Firstly, I assert that *Infèrno* is a space of both melancholia and *acedia*. I aver, controversially, that the end of *Infèrno* VII is to be understood as a representation of *acedia*, following: medieval, theological, Scholastic definitions of the sin; Dante's use of the *hapax*

*legomenon* ‘accidioso’ in this passage; and the portrayal of *acedia* in *Purgatorio* XVIII. I also argue that these few lines describing infernal *acedia* stand more generally for the condition of the whole of *Inferno*, since the characteristics of infernal *acedia*, sadness, darkness, and impeded speech, are found to be shared by most of the other sinners. I propose, moreover, that these characteristics belong not only to medieval *acedia*, but also to twentieth-century melancholia, particularly in its interpretation by Kristeva. In particular, I read Dante’s *Inferno* as the site of melancholic language, which is defined in *Soleil noir* as language that is impeded, interrupted, and repetitive.

Secondly, in contrast to infernal melancholia and melancholic language, I read Dante’s *Purgatorio* as charting the process of a version of the work of mourning. This Dantean work of mourning is found to have important affinities with its Freudian counterpart from whence its name, in my interpretation, derives. Principally, I show that both *Purgatorio* and the Freudian work of mourning depict a finite, irreversible, linear process of detachment from the lost object. The process is in each case, moreover, aided by and indeed achieved through language, whether a psychoanalytical ‘talking cure’ or Dante’s collective, liturgical ‘singing cure’. I therefore interpret *Purgatorio* as the place where the blocked, self-absorbed language of infernal *acedia* and melancholia is overcome through music and speech therapy, and particularly through the singing of psalms and hymns and the reciting of *exempla*. I characterise language in Purgatory as not only liturgical but also performative, in the Austinian sense that it produces a change, unlike the infernal repetition of language which reinforces stasis and does not allow for transformation. I focus in particular on the psalms as a model for the performative, salvific force of the *Commedia*. It is, however, necessary to recognise that while in the Freudian model of mourning the lost object is relinquished in order to be replaced by another, equally fallible love object, in

Dante's version the lost object or 'cosa mortale' is relinquished in order to devote oneself to God and yet reaffirmed because of the possibility of reunion in Heaven. By way of conclusion to this chapter I thus consider the reappearance of Beatrice in the Garden of Eden in *Purgatorio* XXX, which both confirms and challenges the necessity and validity of the work of mourning as the guiding principle of the middle *cantica*.

In Chapter Two I focus on Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and demonstrate the resonances of Kristevan melancholic language with Petrarch's poetry on a micro- and a macro-textual level, that is, in terms not only of particular poems which thematise the difficulty of speech and the endlessness of loss but also as regards the overall fragmented structure of the collection, which was originally conceived as a 'liber fragmentorum', a 'book of fragments', and remains a compilation of 'rime sparse', 'scattered rhymes', as the opening poem of the collection acknowledges. This consideration of fragmented melancholic language in Petrarch's poetry is helpfully augmented by a re-introduction of Dante's *Inferno* (defined as melancholic in Chapter One) into the discussion. I argue that Petrarch deliberately adopts aspects of Dantean infernal language (such as those from *Inferno* V and other examples already highlighted in the previous chapter), which are recognisable as explicit intertextual recollections of his predecessor. I interpret this intertextual engagement as an attempt to recontextualise the melancholic language of *Inferno* and render it characteristic of the experience of love and loss in this life. Following the paradox of Kristevan melancholia, which is a source both of linguistic impediment and linguistic creativity, I show how Petrarch recognises and accepts, unlike the mature Dante, the paradoxical beauty of infernal language and seeks to translate this linguistic allure into his own poetry. Concomitant with Petrarch's fixation on the language of *Inferno* is an acknowledgement of the ultimate incompatibility of Dante and Petrarch as regards the aftermath of the death of the beloved

and the significance of the physical body of the deceased. This incompatibility is recognised despite the undisputed importance, for Petrarch, of *Purgatorio* XXX and XXXI (Dante's reunion with Beatrice in the Garden of Eden at the top of the mountain of Purgatory, also considered at the end of Chapter One).

Yet in the end I contend that Petrarch only partially manages to separate himself from and polarise his position with respect to Dante. In other words, Petrarch's attempt at a recuperation of infernal melancholic language from its infernal context of condemnation remains an attempt that is only partly successful. Instead, Petrarch remains caught between a desire to liberate infernal language from Dante's eventual moral and poetic rejection and a desire to conform to such moral standards himself. This tension results in what I call 'Petrarch's fraught poetics of melancholia', a poetics, that is, which is richly laden and yet a source of guilt and self-doubt. Evidence for such a tension is gathered from a consideration of Petrarchan *acedia* at the end of the chapter. While I acknowledge the importance of the prose dialogue of the *Secretum* for such a consideration, I find Petrarchan *acedia* to be more present and more theologically conventional in the *Canzoniere*, for instance through key words such as 'oblio' and 'altra'. The presence of *acedia* in Petrarch adds a further dimension to the definition of Dantean *acedia* elaborated in Chapter One, and also recognises the centrality of medieval moral discourse and a thwarted desire for conversion in the later poet. Furthermore, while *acedia* and melancholia are found to be analogous in *Inferno*, the example of Petrarch allows steps towards differentiating the two to be taken. If *acedia* is a lack of love (specifically, a lack of love of God and devotion to one's spiritual duties), melancholia is an excess of attachment. Linguistic beauty and creativity are, moreover, associated solely with melancholia (especially Petrarchan rather than Dantean melancholia), while *acedia* has no such redeeming features.

In Chapter Three Proust becomes the focal point of my discussion, and in particular the protagonist's mourning for Albertine in the penultimate volume of the *Recherche*. I acknowledge at the outset that *Albertine disparue* has been interpreted in a Freudian light as presenting evidence for both a kind of work of mourning that leads to 'oubli' and a more complicated, enduring, and guilt-ridden form of melancholia. Ultimately, however, I argue that Derrida's rereading of Freud and his own contribution of an ethical 'demi-deuil' can best clarify what is at stake in Proustian grief. From this perspective, Proustian grief is found to be unending although intermittent and unstable in its manifestations. Derrida's meditation on a form of anticipated mourning that is always already at work in every relationship is also helpful for understanding the frequently proleptic structure of mourning in the *Recherche*, although I demonstrate how the 'comédie de rupture' in *La Prisonnière* does, in contrast, underline the frequent dangers and futility of anticipation.

In the second half of Chapter Three I consider shared models of mourning that are used, to varying effects, by Dante, Petrarch, and Proust. Here I propose, following Girardian terminology, that the mediating role of literature in the experience of mourning be understood as external mimetic mourning. In particular, I focus on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (as presented in Virgil, Ovid, and Boethius, and taken up by Dante, Petrarch, and Proust) as well as on a particular verse from the Old Testament book of Lamentations (1:12). In both cases a Derridean reading of the relationship between the 'propre' and the 'impropre' and the requirements of an ethical language of mourning are apposite. I find that both Petrarch and Proust share an awareness of the fragility of the proper name which sets them apart from Dante. I also consider literary models for a Proustian Hell, and its affinities, explicit or implicit, with Dante's *Inferno* and Petrarch's living Hell. I propose that discourses of mourning are caught between the demands of uniqueness, that is, fidelity to the personal

nature of the loss and the irreplaceable lost object, and the demands of communality, which guarantee legibility and the comfort of participation in what Darian Leader calls ‘a *dialogue of mournings*’. I see the relationship between the individual and the collective as most harmonious in Dante (both in the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia*), and as increasingly fraught in Petrarch and Proust. I conclude that *Albertine disparue* is an attempt to free mourning from literary precedent and be true to its reality, in contrast to the protagonist’s anticipated mourning of the grandmother which is suffused with Orphic overtones, but that this attempt renders the penultimate volume of the *Recherche* especially difficult to read.

In the Epilogue, I turn to Dante’s *Vita nuova*, using this text to check and challenge conclusions that have been garnered throughout the thesis. The *Vita nuova* reopens as much as consolidates observations drawn from this sustained contrastive reading of Dante, Petrarch, and Proust, and in this way respects the complexity of the wide-ranging project. In particular, I compare the reappearance of Beatrice at the end of the *Vita nuova* with the involuntary memory of the grandmother in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (the episode of the ‘intermittences du cœur’), and use these two specific narrated events – which I identify as ‘epiphanies’ – to pinpoint the differences between the experiences of grief and the possibilities of regaining or refinding the beloved in Dante and Proust. In this contrastive reading I use two different views of sublimation, briefly introduced in Chapter Two and defined at the start of the Epilogue: on the one hand a Freudian perspective of sublimation as transcendence or redemption; on the other, Bersani’s reinterpretation, in *The Freudian Body* (1986), of sublimation as a continuation and an extension of desire. I use these contrasting definitions to guide my answering of questions at the heart of this thesis, namely, whether writing aids or impedes the work of mourning, or in Petrarch’s terms (cited as the epigraph to the Introduction, and also in Chapter Two), whether writing is the beginning

(‘initium’) or end (‘exitus’) of melancholia. The examples of Dante, Petrarch, and Proust provide different answers to such a question, and I argue that these different answers reveal not merely personal choice or circumstances, but more importantly an imbrication of form and content. I assert that there is a direct correlation and mutual dependency between different forms of grief and different forms of writing. Yet the choice between closure (the successful work of mourning carried out in *Purgatorio*) and non-closure (endless melancholia, encapsulated in the endless, labyrinthine circularity of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*) is, appropriately, disrupted by Derridean ‘demi-deuil’ which seeks to deconstruct such binary opposites and comes closer to the subtleties of the structural complexity of Proust’s *Recherche*, which is both open and closed. In this final consideration of Dante, Petrarch, and Proust, especial attention is paid to the image of the book of memory and the theme of *temps perdu*, which unite all three in different ways.

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Throughout my time as a postgraduate, I have been lucky to have the constant dialogical support of David Bowe, and Julia Hartley with whom to share my enthusiasm for Dante and Proust, while Alexandra Hills and Elizabeth Ward provided the kindest encouragement and comradeship from further afield. The weekly forum of the Petrarch Reading Group has been a pure joy to attend. Anna Elsner kindly let me read her brilliant thesis on mourning in Proust before its publication and generously shared her expertise on Proustian mourning with comments on the present work. Francesca Southerden most helpfully read parts of this thesis and her intimate understanding of Petrarch has always been a source of inspiration. From my distant memories of undergraduate days I wish to acknowledge the encouragement of Emanuela Tandello and Kate Tunstall, who as demanding but heartening tutors enabled me to hone my reading skills immeasurably.

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## Abbreviations.

- ALR* Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1987-89)
- Corr.* Marcel Proust, *Correspondance*, ed. by Philip Kolb, 21 vols (Paris: Plon, 1970-93)
- CSB* Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve précédé de Pastiches et Mélanges et suivi de Essais et articles*, ed. by Pierre Clarac with Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, 1971)
- ED* *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 6 vols (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970-78)
- Inf.* Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, taken from *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1966-67), II (1966)
- Met.* Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller, rev. by G.P. Goold, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977-84), I (books 1-8), II (books 9-15)
- MSB* *My Secret Book*, translation of *Secretum* by J. G. Nichols (London: Hesperus Press, 2002)
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com/> [all entries cited last accessed 4 July 2013]
- Par.* Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, taken from *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1966-67), IV (1967)
- Purg.* Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, taken from *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1966-67), III (1967)
- [*Inf.*, *Purg.*, and *Par.* are followed by the *canto* number in Roman numerals, and the line number(s) in Arabic]
- RVF* Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere* [also known as the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*], ed. by Marco Santagata, 4th edition (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 2010) [Quotations in Chapter Two are referenced by poem and line number(s) without the abbreviation *RVF* for the sake of reduced density]

- SE*            *The Standard Edition to the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74; repr. London: Vintage, 2001)  
[*SE* followed by the volume number in Roman numerals and page number(s) in Arabic numerals]
- Secretum*     Petrarch, *Secretum* [*De secreto conflictu curarum mearum*], ed. by Enrico Carrara, in *Prose* (Milan and Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1955), pp. 22-215
- SN*            Julia Kristeva, *Soleil noir: dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987)
- ST*            Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, ed. by Bernardo Maria de Rubeis and Charles René Billuart, 6 vols (Taurini: Marietti, 1820; repr. 1928)
- ‘*ST*’            Thomas Aquinas, *The ‘Summa theologiae’*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 22 vols (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1927)
- VN*            *Vita nuova*, ed. by Domenico De Robertis, in Dante Alighieri, *Opere minori*, ed. by Cesare Vasoli and Domenico De Robertis, 2 vols (Milan and Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1988), I, pp. 27-247

All quotations from the Bible are taken from the following edition of the Vulgate:

*Biblia Sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. by B. Fisher, R. Weber, R. Gryson, and others, 4th rev. edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994)  
and the following English translation (Douay-Rheims):

*The Holy Bible translated from the Latin Vulgate*, Douay Rheims version, revised by Richard Challoner (Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, 1989).

Psalm numbers, in particular, therefore refer to numbering in the Vulgate rather than that followed by more modern editions.

I write of Melancholy, by being busie to avoid Melancholy.  
Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*

And so each venture  
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate  
With shabby equipment always deteriorating  
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,  
Undisciplined squads of emotion.  
T.S. Eliot, 'East Coker', from *Four Quartets*

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## **Introduction. Interpolating the Medieval and the Modern**

Melancholie species infinitas ferunt: alii lapides iactant, alii libros scribunt; huic scribere furoris initium est, huic exitus.

*One hears of innumerable types of melancholy. Some throw stones, others write books. For one, writing is the beginning of madness; for another, it is the end.*<sup>1</sup>

These lines, from Petrarch's handbook on how to deal with the cruel blows of fortune, provide a fitting prologue to this thesis, which seeks to elaborate a constellation of different melancholic positions through close attention to a pertinent selection of works of poetry, narrative, and theory. Dante, Petrarch, and Proust did not, as far as their biographers have been able to ascertain, throw stones. They did, however, write books. This thesis takes, then, as its subject matter these three writers: a medieval Italian poet, Dante Alighieri; another Italian poet on the borderlines of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Francesco Petrarca (hereafter Petrarch); and a modern French novelist, Marcel Proust. This triad of primary authors is supplemented by a further triad of writers, this time critical theorists: the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud; another psychoanalyst, novelist, and literary critic, Julia

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<sup>1</sup> From Petrarch, *Les remèdes aux deux fortunes/De remediis utriusque fortune (1354-1366)*, ed. and trans. by Christophe Carraud, 2 vols (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2002), I, p. 228 (book I, chapter 44, 'De scriptorum fama'). English translation from *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul: A Modern English Translation of 'De remediis utriusque fortune', with a Commentary*, ed. and trans. by Conrad H. Rawski, 5 vols (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), I, p. 145 (book I, chapter 44, 'Fame as a Writer'). Peter Hainsworth draws attention to this little-known passage in *Petrarch the Poet: An Introduction to the 'Rerum vulgarium fragmenta'* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 83.

Kristeva; and the philosopher Jacques Derrida to whom, despite his resistance of such labels (as I discuss below), the literary approach of deconstruction is attributed. What connects these six writers is that each reflects profoundly on the experience of grief. The catalyst for this thesis is the realisation that the experience of loss occasioned by the death of the beloved is central to Dante's youthful prosimetrum, the *Vita nuova*, Petrarch's poetic collection, the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (also known as the *Canzoniere*), and Proust's seven-volume novel, *A la recherche du temps perdu*. In this thesis I also engage extensively with Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, and Petrarch's *Secretum*, since these texts are highly relevant to discussions of loss and learning to leave earthly attachments behind. Dante's *Paradiso* lies largely beyond the scope of this investigation, since it is a space of bliss and beatitude where loss and grief should have no place; its paradoxical status demands careful consideration upon which the 'piccioletta barca' (*Par.*II.1) of this study does not attempt to embark, save for passing remarks in Chapter Three and a consideration of closure and the *Commedia* in the Epilogue.<sup>2</sup>

In this introduction, I define, firstly, the key terms of this investigation, starting with the twin titular poles of discourse and mourning. Secondly, I elucidate the shifting critical stances towards mourning and melancholia embodied by each of the theorists chosen and explain how these viewpoints are, in different ways, instrumental to the argument of this thesis. Thirdly, I review the existing comparative critical literature on Dante, Petrarch, and

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<sup>2</sup> The reader is referred to the following for consideration of the problem of desire and satiety in *Paradiso*: Regina Psaki, 'Love for Beatrice: Transcending Contradiction in the *Paradiso*', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 115-30; Manuele Gragnolati, 'Nostalgia in Heaven: Embraces, Affection and Identity in the *Commedia*', in *Dante and the Human Body: Eight Essays*, ed. by John C. Barnes and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), pp. 17-37, and *Amor che move: Linguaggio del corpo e forma del desiderio in Dante, Pasolini e Morante* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2013); Lino Pertile, *La punta del desiderio: Semantica del desiderio nella 'Commedia'* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2005); and Elena Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire: Language and Love in Augustine, the Modistae, Dante* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 121-74 (especially, on *Paradiso*, pp. 153-6). For a recent reading of *Paradiso* in the light of modern French theory, see William Franke, *Dante and the Sense of Transgression: 'The Trespass of the Sign'* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Proust, as well as theoretical readings of these authors that have informed my approach. Finally, I propose a new approach to comparative literature which I pursue in this thesis, that of contrastive reading and interpolation.

### *A definition of discourse*

I use the word ‘discourse’ principally in its etymological sense of movement. As Roland Barthes reminds his reader in *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, ‘Dis-cursus, c’est, originellement, l’action de courir ça et là, ce sont des allées et venues, des « démarches », des « intrigues »’.<sup>3</sup> The ‘discourses’ of my title refer, then, to the need to move between theories and texts in an effort to create pluri-linguistic textual dialogues. Two images can be adduced to illustrate such a movement: Robert Burton’s ‘melancholy spaniel’, and the Freudian game of *fort/da*.

The first image comes from *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, a seminal early seventeenth-century text which became a sort of encyclopedia for the early-modern obsession with this emotional state. At the start of this lengthy work, Burton acknowledges that he proceeds in fits and starts, digressively, and with a compendiousness that can be daunting or confusing:

This roving humour [...] I have ever had, & like a ranging Spaniell, that barks at every bird he sees, leaving his game, I have followed all, saving that which I should, & may justly complaine, & truly [...], that I have read many Bookes, but to little purpose, for want of good method, I have confusedly tumbled over divers Authors in our Libraries, with small profit, for want of Art, Order, Memory, Judgement.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), p. 7. The *OED* notes similarly, concerning the etymology of the verb ‘to discourse’, that it comes from the Latin *discurrere* meaning ‘to run to and fro’.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair, with commentary by J.B. Bamborough and Martin Dodsworth, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989–2000), 1, p. 4. Burton also speaks of his work as a ‘Discourse’, 1, p. 110. Burton’s ‘melancholy spaniel’ is discussed by Ruth A. Fox, *The Tangled Chain: The Structure of Disorder in the ‘Anatomy of Melancholy’* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), especially p. 99. See also, on the importance of this work, and on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century melancholy in general, Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A*

Beneath Burton's disarming *captatio benevolentiae*, this passage reveals a fundamental concern shared by this thesis, that of the utility and validity of 'tumb[ing] over divers authors', and of the motivation behind particular choices and orderings of texts. While I address this concern in due course in this introduction, I note here merely that the 'roving humour' of the 'ranging Spaniell' moving from quarry to quarry is a useful dynamic image for the enthusiastic, discursive, multi-directional movement underpinning this thesis.

The second image comes from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (SE XVIII:7-64). This work has been variously described as 'the darkest and most stubborn riddle posed by the legacy of psychoanalysis'<sup>5</sup> and 'le texte le plus fascinant et le plus déroutant de toute l'œuvre freudienne'.<sup>6</sup> One of the text's images, that of a child playing with a cotton reel, has become a particularly knotty but fruitful locus of interpretation. In this scene Freud is both narrator and analyst; he does not merely watch the game played by the child (who is, in fact, his grandson) but also interprets the accompanying sounds as meaningful. The game, in Freud's estimation, is thus clarified by two words, *fort* ('there', 'gone', 'distant') and *da* ('here', 'back', 'present'), which reveal that in this throwing action the child is restaging his mother's absences and presences, albeit in a controlled, symbolic manner. In 'Spéculer sur – « Freud »', Derrida in turn interprets the child's *fort/da* as mirrored in the back and forth of Freud's writing.<sup>7</sup> In other words, for Derrida, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, form and content coalesce so as to destabilise the linear quest for decisive, scientific truth in favour of a more open, complicated movement of interminable oscillation, a movement that is, in my

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*Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1951) and *Sanity in Bedlam: A Study of Robert Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy'* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1959).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Laplanche, *Vie et mort en psychanalyse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1970), p. 163.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *La Carte postale de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), pp. 275-437.

terms, *discursive*. At this stage, this initial reference to the formal game of *fort/da* is a useful way of mapping out my own movement between different texts and authors. In this movement, first one work and then another is successively brought to the fore and then left in the background, to create a polyphonic interweaving of different literary and theoretical voices.<sup>8</sup> The game's more complex and profound relationship to other psychoanalytical concepts such as the death drive or melancholia is explored in Chapter One. In Chapter Three, Derrida's interpretation of Freud's *fort/da* is used to delineate the melancholic rhythm of Derridean 'demi-deuil', which I see at work in Proust's *Albertine disparue*, and which entails an unpredictable emotional and textual oscillation that sustains an intermittent relationship with the deceased beloved.

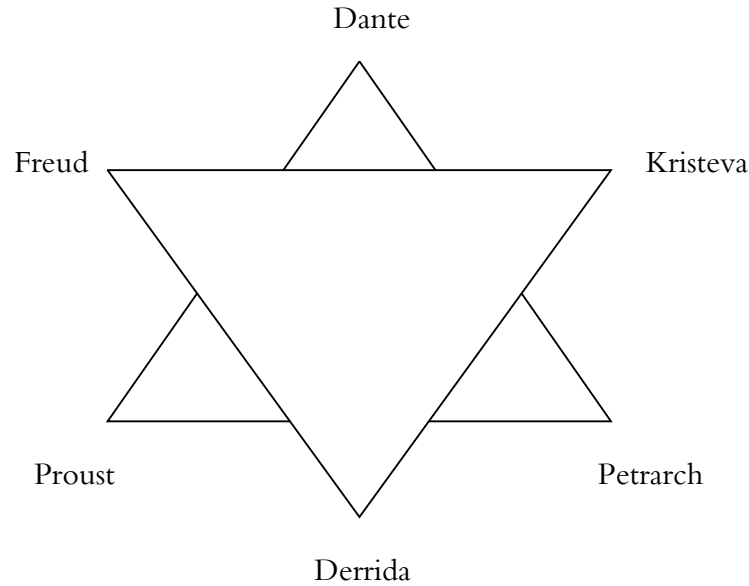
These two images figure the discursive structuring principle of my thesis, which involves constant movement between primary texts, criticism, and theory, between analysis and quotation, between French and Italian, and between medieval and modern texts and ideas. As in Derrida's 'Spéculer sur – « Freud »', this 'movement between' is a driving force at the level of both form (the writing of this thesis) and content (the primary texts which themselves, in particular Petrarch and Proust, often depict paradoxical oscillation). The movement of the former can be mapped according to a process of 'triangulation', a term which I take from George Steiner. At several points in his work, Steiner advocates reading three texts at once in order to understand what is at stake in each.<sup>9</sup> In the following diagram, I thus imagine my thesis in terms of two superimposed triangles, in a mobile, moving, and moveable framework that allows for different theoretical lenses to inform each

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<sup>8</sup> The concept of literary polyphony (particularly in the novel) is developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> In *My Unwritten Books* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008), George Steiner even suggests, encouragingly for two-thirds at least of this thesis, that 'Both the *Recherche* and *SCC* can be "triangulated" in relation to Dante's *Commedia*' (p. 18). The abbreviation *SCC* refers to *Science and Civilisation in China*, ed. by Joseph Needham and others, 30 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997–2004).

author's oeuvre in turn. The base triangle features my chosen primary *ménage à trois*, Dante, Petrarch, and Proust, and the upper triangle the main theorists informing my reading, namely Freud, Derrida, and Kristeva.



*Figure 1: Diagram of the two-layered textual triangulation around which this thesis is structured.*

This diagram illustrates the pairing of primary and theoretical works that structures Chapters One to Three: Dante and Freud, in Chapter One; Petrarch and Kristeva in Chapter Two; Proust and Derrida in Chapter Three. Yet the star layout is significant since each theorist also acts in part as a bridge or stopping point between two authors in particular. Thus, Chapter Two (on Petrarch) draws on Chapter One's Kristevan reading of *Infèrno*, while Chapter Three both differentiates Proust and Dante using Freudian terms and brings together Proust and Petrarch through a Derridean interpretation.<sup>10</sup> This arrangement is, then, neither arbitrary nor immutable, and provides a flexible but crystalline framework for the

<sup>10</sup> I do not broach the possibility of Derridean readings of Dante, although I note that such readings have been successfully pursued by other critics: John Leavey, 'Derrida and Dante: Differance and the Eagle in the Sphere of Jupiter', *Modern Language Notes*, 91:1 (January 1976), 60-8; Jeremy Tambling, *Dante and Difference: Writing in the 'Commedia'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Francis J. Ambrosio, *Dante and Derrida: Face to Face* (Albany: State University of New York Press: 2007).

consideration of difficult topics and authors across a wide space of time. Moreover, the structure of this thesis might also be imagined as pyramidal, since I move, cumulatively, to a more and more overtly comparative approach, with my literary focus being on Dante alone in Chapter One, Petrarch and Dante in Chapter Two, and Proust, Petrarch, and Dante in Chapter Three and the Epilogue.

It is necessary, at this juncture, having amply defined the ramifications of the concept of ‘discourse’ and outlined the structure of my thesis in general terms, to turn to the other key term of my title, ‘mourning’, as it is theorised in the work of Freud, Derrida, and Kristeva. I note that where I use the term in isolation, it acts as a synonym for grief and the anguish of bereavement. It is, in this sense, a generic term for an experience that encompasses both ‘*the work of mourning*’ and the complex term ‘melancholia’. Only occasionally, to avoid cumbersome sentences, do I abbreviate ‘the work of mourning’ to mourning. Such an abbreviation will be clear from the context, and is most frequently to be found in Chapter One, where the overarching analysis of the work of mourning in Dante’s *Purgatorio* renders the specificity of what is called, in short, mourning easy to follow. As regards the terms ‘melancholy’ and ‘melancholia’, I tend to avoid the former as too vague (although, as I note at the start of Chapters Two and Three in relation to Petrarch and Proust, ‘melancholy’ is a favourite Romantic descriptor). The latter term, ‘melancholia’, is defined according to different criteria enumerated below, following Freud, Kristeva, and Derrida respectively. It is worth remarking here that Dante avoided the term ‘Malinconia’ as too scientific and ugly a word to be included in his *Vita nuova*.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the term is used

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<sup>11</sup> Dante excluded the sonnet ‘Un dì si venne a me Malinconia’ from the *Vita nuova*. For the text of this sonnet, see Dante Alighieri, *Rime giovanili e della ‘Vita nuova’*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini with notes by Manuele Gragnolati (Milan: BUR Rizzoli, 2009), pp. 379–84. On Dante’s dislike of the term ‘malinconia’, see Mario Marti, *Cultura e stile nei poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1953), p. 94, and Giuseppe Petronio, ‘Malinconia’, *Lingua nostra*, 9:1–2 (March and June 1948), 7–13.

by Petrarch only in Latin, philosophical contexts (as in the epigraph above). It should also be noted that, following Paul Strohm's model of 'practical theory',<sup>12</sup> I prefer in general to juxtapose primary text and theory, so that more detailed explanations of these theoretical writings are to be found integrated into each relevant chapter, rather than relying on elaborate and abstract explication in this introduction.

### *Twentieth-century theories of mourning*

Melancholia has a long history, which goes all the way back to Aristotelian times and is traced in brief at the start of Julia Kristeva's *Soleil noir* (SN, pp. 16–18) and at greater length in an anthology by Jennifer Radden.<sup>13</sup> This thesis is not a history of melancholia, but rather a study of a few, diverse melancholic moments in the history of literature. It is therefore unnecessary to retrace this established history, except in so far as it involves my chosen theorists, all three of whom are prominent thinkers of the twentieth century (and the start of the twenty-first, in the case of Derrida and Kristeva). I consider that describing an author such as Petrarch as melancholic is not helpful in itself, but that using different existing criteria such as those propounded by Freud or Kristeva to define melancholia helps move towards a definition of what Petrarchan melancholia might be (see Chapter Two), in contrast to Dantean infernal melancholia (the topic of Chapter One) or Proustian melancholia

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, ed. by Jennifer Radden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also: Jean Starobinski, *Histoire du traitement de la mélancolie des origines à 1900* (Basel: Acta psychosomatica, 1960); Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (London: Nelson, 1964); Stanley W. Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic to Modern Times* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Jennifer Radden, 'Mourning and Melancholia', in *Pathologies of the Modern Self: Postmodern Studies on Narcissism, Schizophrenia, and Depression*, ed. by David Michael Levin (New York: New York University Press, 1987), pp. 231–50, and *Moody Minds Distempered: Essays on Melancholy and Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Henry Staten, *Eros in Mourning: Homer to Lacan* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995).

(explored in Chapter Three).<sup>14</sup> Freud himself professes, as regards melancholia, to ‘drop all claim to general validity for [his] conclusions’, since his ‘material [...] is limited to a small number of cases’ (*SE* XIV:243). A similar caveat appertains to this thesis. Yet any discourse of mourning remains both universal *and* particular; we might say of the language of mourning, as Elena Lombardi observes about ‘[t]he discourse of love’, that it ‘is, and it is not, the same across centuries and cultures. The universality that makes it forever present and actual should not overshadow its particularity and its culture- and age-bound nature.’<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Adam Phillips is right to remind us that ‘psychoanalytic theory is always local history’;<sup>16</sup> Freud may have claimed for psychoanalysis the universal validity of myth, but it should not be disassociated from its original time and place. It is for these reasons and with such cautions in mind that I now briefly outline the defining features of these different twentieth-century theories of melancholia, which are but one part of the ‘melancholie species infinitas’ or ‘*innumerable types of melancholy*’ acknowledged in the epigraph.

For our purposes, the foundational theoretical work is Freud’s short essay ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (*SE* XIV:237–58). In this text, for the first time an attempt is made both to associate and to distinguish the two terms. Innovatively, Freud argues that melancholia is, like mourning, connected to loss, albeit to a loss that remains unconscious (*SE* XIV:247). He also analyses the process of mourning as one of libidinal detachment in preparation for re-attachment to a replacement love object. What he calls the ‘work of mourning’ is defined as a result of ‘Reality-testing [which] has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and [...]’

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<sup>14</sup> See Michael D. Snediker, *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 14, for a criticism of an undefined use of the term melancholia which is often too general to be meaningful.

<sup>15</sup> Elena Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves: Love and Desire in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Montreal: M<sup>c</sup>Gill-Queen’s University Press, 2012), p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Adam Phillips, *Promises, Promises: Essays on Literature and Psychoanalysis* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. 9.

proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object' (SE XIV:244). The work of mourning or detachment is then 'carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy' (SE XIV:245). Even while attempting to differentiate mourning and melancholia, Freud acknowledges that the two have many shared characteristics:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. [...] The disturbance of self-regard is absent in mourning; but otherwise the features are the same. (SE XIV:244)

These noted similarities muddy the waters somewhat.

In Chapter One, I use Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' in order to characterise the different languages of grief in the first two *cantiche* of Dante's *Commedia*. In brief, I interpret the difference between the work of mourning and melancholia (a difference which Freud admittedly struggles to pinpoint) as parallel to that between *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. I show that while Dante's Hell is the site of endless stasis and language as painful, destructive repetition of the past, Dante's Purgatory is a finite, time-bound place of movement where linguistic repetition is productive and constructive. In this polar characterisation of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* I find that it is useful to consider the former as melancholic (according to Freud's definition of melancholia and Kristeva's definition of melancholic language, which I elucidate shortly), and the latter as the site of a process which is analogous to the Freudian work of mourning. In this focus on different types of language, I turn both to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's work on repetition,<sup>17</sup> and to J.L. Austin's theory of performativity.<sup>18</sup> In

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<sup>17</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, 'The Paradoxical Status of Repetition', *Poetics Today*, 1 (1980), 151-9.

<sup>18</sup> John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). For a summary of different theoretical approaches to the performative, see Jonathan D. Culler, 'Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative', *Poetics Today*, 21:3 (2000), 503-19. The usefulness of the

particular, I discuss how Dante chooses to employ liturgical language in *Purgatorio* for its performative power, that is, for its ability to produce a change, which allows the purgatorial souls to free themselves from their past sin and move towards their heavenly future.<sup>19</sup> Chapter One's discussion of the role of language in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* is centred around one particular sin, the sin of *acedia*.<sup>20</sup> I argue, controversially, that the end of *Inferno* VII does depict the sin of *acedia*, and that this sin is a distinct but associated part of the circle of the angry. I draw on medieval theology to support my argument, as well as a comparative reading of *acedia* in the fifth circle of Hell and the fourth terrace of the mountain of Purgatory.<sup>21</sup> I note similarities between medieval *acedia* and twentieth-century melancholia, particularly as regards the prevalence of disrupted, impeded speech in both. I conclude that the darkness and aphasia of *acedia* are melancholic and typical of *Inferno* as a whole, and that the possibility of curing sin through a correct (that is, for Dante, liturgical and collective) use of language is particularly eminent in the direct, unimpeded, repeated, communal speech of the purgatorial *accidiosi*.

In this reading of Dante through Freud I am attempting to address a gap which Guglielmo Gorni has identified in Freud's corpus, that is, the lack of reflection on Dante:

Tra un Dante così apertamente *confesso jam a pueris* e il perfetto umanista Sigmund Freud è da deplorare un incontro mancato. [...] [U]na lettura psicanalitica di materia

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performative for literary studies is demonstrated, for instance, in *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, ed. by Manuele Gragnolati and Almut Suerbaum (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), to which I return in Chapter One.

<sup>19</sup> A good summary of liturgical language in *Purgatorio* is John C. Barnes, 'Vestiges of the Liturgy in Dante's Verse', in *Dante and the Middle Ages: Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. by John C. Barnes and Cormac Ó Cuilleánáin (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995), pp. 231–69. Other relevant critical works are referenced in Chapter One itself.

<sup>20</sup> The authoritative work on this sin is Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), on which I draw at the start of Chapter One.

<sup>21</sup> In this comparison of the same sin across the first two *cantiche* I follow such fruitful studies as Manuele Gragnolati, 'Gluttony and the Anthropology of Pain in Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*', in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, ed. by Rachel Fulton and Bruce W. Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 238–50.

dantesca da parte di Freud, che si applicò a Leonardo e Michelangelo scultore, sarebbe stata un evento capitale per la ricezione moderna dell'opera di Dante.<sup>22</sup>

I am also following in the footsteps of other critics who have begun to suggest comparative readings of Dante and Freud.<sup>23</sup> In particular, Jeremy Tambling's description of the terrace of sloth in *Purgatorio* as a transformation of melancholia into mourning is informative for Chapter One.<sup>24</sup> Yet, having already noted that psychoanalysis is 'local history', according to Adam Phillips, I approach Freud not as a universal benchmark against which to compare other historically situated writers such as Dante or Proust, but rather with a view to challenging Freud's insights by reading Freud through Dante just as much as Dante through Freud.

Chapter Two develops out of the concern with *acedia* and Kristevan melancholic language evinced in Chapter One, although the focus is now not Dante but Petrarch. Kristeva is thus the next stage in this summary consideration of twentieth-century melancholia. In *Soleil noir: dépression et mélancolie*, Kristeva draws on examples taken not only from her own clinical experience but also from literary and artistic contexts in order to elaborate the chief characteristics of melancholic language. Her chief aesthetic examples are

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<sup>22</sup> Guglielmo Gorni, 'Beatrice agli inferi', in *Ommaggio a Beatrice 1290-1990*, ed. by Rudy Abardo (Florence: Le Lettere, 1997), pp. 143-58 (p. 151). On Freud's passion for Italy and Italian literature, see *Freud and Italian Culture*, ed. by Pierluigi Barrotta and Laura Lepschy with Emma Bond (Bern and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Thomas Parisi, 'Freud as Virgil: The Anthropologies of Psychoanalysis and the *Commedia*', in *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals*, ed. by Richard Newhauser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 257-74. In a literary context, Giorgio Pressburger's *Nel regno oscuro* (Milan: Bompiani, 2008) replaces Virgil with Freud. See Gragnolati, 'Rewriting Freud after the Shoah: Giorgio Pressburger's *Nel regno oscuro*', in *Metamorphosing Dante: Appropriations, Manipulations, and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. by Manuele Gragnolati, Fabio Camilletti, and Fabian Lampart (Vienna-Berlin: Verlag Turin + Kant, 2011), pp. 235-50, and Gragnolati, with Emma Bond and Laura Lepschy, 'Riscrivere Dante in un'altra lingua: Conversazione con Giorgio Pressburger su *Nel regno oscuro*', in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, ed. by Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gragnolati, and Jürgen Trabant (London: Legenda, 2010), pp. 249-66.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremy Tambling, 'Dreaming the Siren: Dante and Melancholy', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 40 (2004), 56-69, and *Dante in Purgatory: States of Affect* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 145-73. Tambling has also written on Dante and Walter Benjamin, although such an interpretation lies outside the remit of this thesis. See his 'Dante and Benjamin: Melancholy and Allegory', *Exemplaria*, 4:2 (1992), 341-63, and 'Thinking Melancholy: Allegory and the *Vita nuova*', *The Romanic Review*, 96:1 (January 2005), 85-105. On Benjaminian melancholy, see Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

Hans Holbein's *Le Christ mort* (*Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*), Gérard de Nerval's sonnet 'El Desdichado', from which the title, *Soleil noir*, is taken, and works by Fyodor Dostoevsky and Marguerite Duras respectively. In its openness to fictional and poetic sources, *Soleil noir* is particularly suitable for consideration in literary criticism, as this thesis demonstrates.

Language is the crux of Kristeva's theory of melancholia. For Kristeva, successful mourning (which, following Freud, is imagined as an acceptance of loss and a willingness to seek a replacement for the lost object) is, seemingly, a prerequisite of a successful use of language. In Kristeva's imagined first-person voicing of this conundrum, '« parce que j'accepte de la perdre, je ne l'ai pas perdue (voici la dénégation), je peux la récupérer dans le langage »' (*SN*, p. 55). (As I examine in a moment, Kristeva's choice of the pronoun 'la' to designate the exemplary lost object is far from neutral.) In contrast, unsuccessful mourning (what Kristeva calls 'le deuil impossible') results in an unsuccessful command of language, since the object is not in fact lost and so no such clear-cut linguistic compensation is possible. Linguistic indicators of melancholia for Kristeva, therefore, are broken speech, slowness, repetition, threat of collapse into silence, disrupted syntax, and the state of being at a loss for words. The 'parole dépressive' is 'répétitive, monotone, ou bien vidée de sens, inaudible même pour celui qui la dit, avant qu'il ne s'abîme dans le mutisme' (*SN*, p. 54).<sup>25</sup> It is in such respects that Kristeva's characterisation of melancholic language is shown, in Chapter One, to be a helpful way of hearing the language of the damned souls in Dante's *Infêrno*.

Yet, paradoxically, Kristeva also acknowledges that melancholic language is not necessarily failed, impeded language (as I see epitomised in *Infêrno*) but rather can be a

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<sup>25</sup> Marie-Claude Lambotte reaches similar conclusions to Kristeva as to the characteristic features of melancholic language in *Le Discours mélancolique: de la phénoménologie à la métaphysique* (Paris: Anthropos, 1993), although I remain instead with Kristeva's argument because of its deliberate appropriateness to literary analysis, whereas Lambotte's focus is solely clinical.

source of creativity. In Chapter Two I engage more fully with this dual aspect of Kristevan melancholic language, which I find to be particularly appropriate for Petrarch as a poet of paradox. For Kristeva, melancholic creativity is a consequence of disillusionment with language, which in some cases results not (or not immediately) in silence, but rather in a quest for new, original forms of linguistic expression: ‘Le surplus d’affect n’a donc pas d’autre moyen pour se manifester que de produire de nouveaux langages – des enchaînements étranges, des idiolectes, des poétiques’ (SN, p. 54). The melancholic loss of contact with reality and with ordinary, phatic language can inspire new, highly personal contortions of language. Moreover, the characteristics of melancholic language identified by Kristeva in *Soleil noir* – repetition, monotony, fragmentation – overlap with noted poetic devices, and are useful for understanding Petrarch’s *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* at both a macro- and micro-textual level. Petrarch is keenly aware of the poetic power of his sighs and tears, which are both painful, physiological expressions of his unrequited love for Laura, and the subject matter of his poetry. In Chapter Two I also continue to explore the relationship between *acedia* and melancholia. I suggest that *acedia* as lack of love for God is present in Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* particularly in the recurrent theme of ‘oblio’, forgetfulness. The tension between the guilt of *acedia* and the pleasures and pains of melancholic attachment to Laura is unresolved in Petrarch, and remains a fertile source of incessant poetic self-interrogation and revision.

There is a further aspect of Kristevan melancholia which I should address here, but which is not one that this thesis pursues. This facet is the role of the mother in Kristevan melancholia. For Kristeva, melancholia is not only impossible mourning, but more specifically the ‘*deuil impossible de l’objet maternel*’ (SN, p. 19, emphases in the original); melancholia harks back to and even revives and relives the foundational childhood

experience of the loss of the mother which has never been fully accepted. Similarly, an endless repetition of the *fort/da* which pays more attention to the *fort* than the *da* can be a sign of melancholia and the death drive (or Derridean ‘demi-deuil’), although the game is also ideally a sign of mastery or transcendence of the mother’s absences for Freud.<sup>26</sup> A necessary condition of getting over melancholia is, according to Kristeva, acceptance of the loss of the mother (and of the loss of union with the mother in the womb and early infancy), which she believes is most successfully achieved through a symbolic matricide and replacement with a new love object.<sup>27</sup> In *Soleil noir*, Kristeva therefore argues that depression and melancholia are particularly prevalent in women, since it is easier for men to mourn successfully their loss of the mother (by transforming the female into an object of desire and replacing the lost mother with other like – at least in terms of gender – love objects) than it is for women, many of whom (i.e. those who are not homosexual) must, ‘par un effort symbolique incroyable’, transfer their desire to an unlike, that is, male, object (SN, p. 38).

It is unsurprising that Kristeva has been criticised for her understanding of familial and gender relations, which is based largely on a hetero-normative perspective, uncomfortably rooted in aggression, and equates depression and melancholia with females in a way that is uneasily redolent of older, oppressive, patriarchal ideas of female hysteria.<sup>28</sup> Kristeva’s theories do, however, redress the balance in respect of a long tradition that genders melancholia as a male malady (because of its link with genius and creativity) in

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<sup>26</sup> Freud admits that ‘the first act, that of departure [*fort*], was staged as a game itself and far more frequently than the episode in its entirety, with its pleasurable ending’, SE XVIII:16.

<sup>27</sup> For a reading of mourning and creativity in Proust’s novel inspired by Kristeva’s matricidal theory (and also by Jacques Lacan), see Annelise Schulte Nordholt, *Le Moi créateur dans ‘A la recherche du temps perdu’* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002), especially on *Albertine disparue*, pp. 125–63, and ‘les intermittences du cœur’, pp. 165–212.

<sup>28</sup> For a summary of such criticisms, and a defense of Kristeva, see Birgit Schippers, *Julia Kristeva and Feminist Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

contrast to the supposedly female malady of depression (which has no such redeeming features).<sup>29</sup> Such concerns about gender stereotypes are not directly addressed in this thesis, although their relevance should be acknowledged in that my primary texts each more or less replicate a situation in which a male author creates a male protagonist who voices his grief over the loss of a loved female character.

Having highlighted the problems that arise from a holistic reading of *Soleil noir* – principally, the noted gender bias and the debatable assumption of necessary violence to the mother – I thus leave to one side these particularly contentious issues, since I am less interested, in this thesis, in such a gendered and ‘primordial’ (in the sense of being experienced in an early, forgotten but foundational moment in an infant’s life) version of events. For my purposes, it seems less helpful to speculate on the *causes* of melancholia in the protagonists of Dante, Petrarch, and Proust (for instance, exploring how the loss of Beatrice, Laura, and Albertine might relate to a residual, latent depression resulting from an impossible and incomplete mourning of the mother), and which would lead to a strange and probably unproductive psychoanalysis of the principal fictional characters, or their creators, or both at once.<sup>30</sup> Instead, I find that focusing on the *symptoms* of melancholia can reveal interesting patterns of structure, style, and imagery that are able to contribute significantly to a new understanding of the works of the three authors. In this respect, Kristeva’s

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<sup>29</sup> See Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), and also Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> Such an interpretation of Petrarch is pursued successfully, however, by Pierre Blanc in the introduction to his translation of the *Canzoniere/Chansonier* (Paris: Bordas, 1988), and in relation to Petrarch’s Latin elegy on the death of his mother, ‘Petrarca ou la poétique de l’ego: éléments de psychopoétique pétrarquienne’, *Revue des Études italiennes*, n.s., 29 (1983), 122–69 and 180–3. More traditionally in terms of literary criticism, the sources of this poem are explored by Elena Giannarelli, ‘Fra mondo classico e agiografia cristiana: Il *Breve pangerycum defuncte matri* di Petrarca’, *Annali della scuola normale superiore di Pisa: Classe di lettere e filosofia*, 9:3 (1979), 1099–1118.

characterisation of melancholic language that is a result of an inability to lose or accept the loss of the love object remains helpful and important.

Kristeva largely endorses Freud's versions of mourning and melancholia, although she does place greater emphasis on the effects of language in such experiences, and brings the role of the mother to the fore. My third theorist, Derrida, has, however, a more complex relationship with Freudian psychoanalysis, which I now explore. Derrida describes himself as an '« ami de la psychanalyse »',<sup>31</sup> where the term 'ami' is both amical (extending the hand of friendship) but also an act of keeping one's distance (as Derrida stresses, he is not a psychoanalyst, nor has he ever been in analysis).<sup>32</sup> Assessing his writings on Freud as a whole, Derrida aptly detects a 'Double geste, donc, toujours: marquer ou remarquer chez Freud une ressource qui n'avait pas encore été lue, me semble-t-il, comme je croyais devoir le faire, mais du même coup soumettre le « texte » de Freud (théorie et institution) à une lecture déconstructive.'<sup>33</sup> As I have already had cause to outline in relation to his reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Derrida tends to prioritise subversive, non-linear elements which are already present in the Freudian text – 'déjà à l'œuvre dans l'œuvre'<sup>34</sup> – but which may not be immediately apparent. Moreover, Derrida's challenge to 'Mourning and Melancholia' as unethical in its proposal of forgetfulness as normal should be recognised as a conclusion that Freud himself subsequently reaches. As Richard Goodkin and subsequently Anna Elsner have explored in relation to Proust specifically, Freud changes his views on

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<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida with Elisabeth Roudinesco, 'Éloge de la psychanalyse', in *De quoi demain... Dialogue* (Paris: Fayard and Galilée, 2001), pp. 269–316 (p. 271).

<sup>32</sup> See Jacques Derrida, 'Let us not Forget – Psychoanalysis', *Oxford Literary Review* 12 (1990), pp. 5–7, *Résistances – de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), and *États de l'âme de la psychanalyse: adresse aux États généraux de la Psychanalyse* (Paris: Galilée, 2000), and also Maud Ellman, '12. Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis', in *Deconstructions: A User's Guide*, ed. by Nicholas Royle (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 211–37.

<sup>33</sup> Derrida, 'Éloges de la psychanalyse', p. 278.

<sup>34</sup> This phrase refers not to Freud specifically, but rather is one of Derrida's attempts to justify deconstruction as already present in the text rather than 'une opération survenant *après coup*, de l'extérieur, un beau jour'. See Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), p. 83.

melancholia from considering it pathological or abnormal (in its excessive attachment to the past) to understanding it as an ethical sign of fidelity to the deceased and an integral part of one's personality, as is clear from texts such as *The Ego and the Id* (SE XIX:7-64) as from particular letters.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, I argue that Proustian mourning should not be understood as a narrative of forgetting and replacement,<sup>36</sup> but rather as closer to an ethics of faithful continuing melancholic attachment. While I acknowledge that this stance is close to Freud's later views on the subject, I suggest that Proustian mourning is most helpfully illuminated by Derrida's concept of 'demi-deuil',<sup>37</sup> that of an interminable oscillation between forgetting and remembering, or, in the terms of the first chapter of *Albertine disparue*, between 'Le chagrin et l'oubli'.

In terms of Derrida's relationship to psychoanalysis, it is important to note that he is in dialogue not only with Freud but with subsequent psychoanalytical theorists such as Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. The latter two propose a reworking of the dichotomy between the work of mourning and melancholia, whereby the first is understood as a process of identification or introjection, and the second as a form of incorporation.<sup>38</sup> As always, Derrida is keen to unpick such dichotomies in favour of a more complex, unstable relationship of two terms, but he does seem to endorse the concept of the melancholic crypt as an ethically necessary means of keeping the other close but distinct from oneself.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See Richard Goodkin, *Around Proust* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 127-45, and Anna Magdalena Elsner, 'Mourning and Creativity in *A la recherche du temps perdu*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2010), pp. 8-15; publication forthcoming Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, although subsequent page references refer to the thesis format.

<sup>36</sup> For a reading of Proustian mourning as cold-hearted, unfaithful forgetfulness, see Alessia Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film* (Stanford: California University Press, 2003).

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, Jacques Derrida, *La Carte postale*, p. 356, and 'Dialangues', in *Points de suspension: entretiens*, ed. by Elisabeth Weber (Paris: Galilée, 1992), p. 161. I review such quotations and definitions in Chapter Three.

<sup>38</sup> Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *L'Écorce et le noyau* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), pp. 259-75.

<sup>39</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Fors: les mots anglés de Nicolas Abraham et Maria Torok', in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *Cryptonymie: le verbier de l'homme aux loups* (Paris: Aubier Flammarion, 1976), pp. 7-73.

Derrida's interrogation of psychoanalysis is consonant with his suspicion about labels, schools, and movements more generally. Nowhere is this suspicion clearer than in his own relationship to deconstruction, which he is credited as creating or founding, but which he frequently repudiated. In a volume entitled *Deconstruction is/in America*, Derrida declares:

I have never claimed to identify myself with what may be designated by this name [deconstruction]. It has always seemed strange to me, it has always left me cold. Moreover, I have never stopped having doubts about the very identity of what is referred to by such a nickname.<sup>40</sup>

Derrida more often defines deconstruction by what it is not (it is, for instance, neither a 'problématique' nor a 'critique')<sup>41</sup> than by what it is, following the pattern of negative theology. Nonetheless, certain of Derrida's positive definitions of deconstruction are helpful for this thesis, and in particular his consideration of deconstruction as '*plus d'une langue*' and '*plus d'une voix*'. In *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*, Derrida hazards the following remark: 'Si j'avais à risquer, Dieu m'en garde, une seule définition de la déconstruction, brève, elliptique, économique comme un mot d'ordre, je dirais sans phrase : *plus d'une langue*.'<sup>42</sup> Derrida subsequently amends this statement, adding: 'La déconstruction, [...] ce n'est pas seulement plus d'une langue, c'est déjà plus d'une voix'.<sup>43</sup> According to such definitions, this thesis would, then, be deconstructive in its exploration of what happens when there is a confrontation between two or more different voices, where these voices are defined not

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<sup>40</sup> Derrida, 'The Time is Out of Joint', trad. by Peggy Kamuf, in *Deconstruction is/in America: A New Sense of the Political*, ed. by Anselm Haverkamp (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 14-38 (p. 15).

<sup>41</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*, p. 92. See, nonetheless, the introductory volume by Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), which does outline positive definitions of what is considered (despite Derrida's reservations) to be classifiable as a philosophical and literary movement.

<sup>42</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*, p. 38 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>43</sup> Derrida, '*Et cetera...* (and so on, and so weiter, and so forth, *et ainsi de suite*, und so überall, etc.)', in *Jacques Derrida*, ed. by Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michaud (Paris: L'Herne, 2004), pp. 21-34 (p. 30). This text is the original French version of Derrida's '15. Et Cetera', trans. by Geoffrey Bennington, in *Deconstructions: A User's Guide*, pp. 282-305 (see p. 296 for the assertion that 'Deconstruction [...] is already more than one voice'). This volume opens with the useful essay by Nicholas Royle, '1. What is Deconstruction?', pp. 1-13, which considers possible definitions of the term.

only by language (French and Italian, with brief forays into Latin and Greek in Chapter One) and by time period (medieval/modern) but also by genre (literary/critical/theoretical languages).

As regards mourning and melancholia in particular, Derrida's thoughts on this topic are scattered throughout his extensive corpus, but can be found in their most concentrated form in the collection *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde*.<sup>44</sup> Derrida's writings on grief are a curious, complex mix of the autobiographical and the theoretical; many of these texts originated as obituaries or funeral eulogies, and are inspired by the specific deaths of friends who were often also important twentieth-century French thinkers in their own right. What I find especially helpful is that Derrida's mournful reflections highlight a productive conflict between the voice of the deceased other and the mourning subject. Again, we encounter the necessity of a multiplicity of languages or voices. This dialogical conflict is a useful model for intertextuality as more generally a type of mourning, and supports my proposal, in Chapter Three, of the phenomenon of 'mimetic mourning'. Inspired by René Girard's formulation of the concept of 'mimetic desire',<sup>45</sup> 'mimetic mourning' suggests that the experience and language of grief are caught in a web of imitation of various models. The two examples I deploy in order to demonstrate this mournful mimesis are the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and the biblical book of Lamentations, rich models of the language of grief on which Dante, Petrarch, and Proust draw in different ways and to varying extents. In Chapter Three I find that mournful language is the product of a constant, creative tension between the demands of the unique (the personal, specific story) and the general (the

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<sup>44</sup> This collection was first published in English under the title *The Work of Mourning*, ed. and trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), although I cite from the subsequent French edition, *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* (Paris: Galilée, 2003). Elsner has already suggested the pertinence of this volume for Proust in 'Mourning and Creativity', p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1961).

abstract, legible version of events), and explore how this tension is played out in my three authors.

Having outlined the divergent theories of melancholia witnessed in Freud, Kristeva, and Derrida, and summarised the main areas of discussion addressed in Chapters One to Three, I now review briefly the existing comparative critical literature on Dante, Petrarch, and Proust. Too much has been written on the relationship between Dante and Petrarch for any satisfactory list to be compiled. Instead, works that I have found particularly useful are referred to in Chapter Two where relevant, and it will suffice here to single out one recent volume, with ample bibliography, which reconsiders the critical debate surrounding this question.<sup>46</sup> In short, Petrarch's attitude towards his poetic forebear is one of ambivalence, which combines an explicit rejection of any interest in Dante with discernible meticulous intertextual recollections of his predecessor's work. I discuss the retrograde manner of Petrarch's use of quotations from Dante in Chapter Two, where Petrarch's tendency to move backwards through Dante's poetic corpus and to privilege the earlier over the later writing is highlighted and where motivations behind such a move are suggested. As regards any precedence for connecting Proust and Petrarch, I reference, in the Epilogue, the various critics who have postulated a link between particular poems from Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and Proustian involuntary memory. Other comparisons arise between Petrarch and Proust as regards subjectivity,<sup>47</sup> love,<sup>48</sup> disorientation,<sup>49</sup> and even *acedia*,<sup>50</sup> a key concern of this thesis,

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<sup>46</sup> *Petrarch and Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Theodore J. Cachey, Jr (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Angelo Caranfa, having been rather dismissive of critics who 'are fond of talking about [Proust's] relationship with Dante', in passing opens up one avenue for exploring for the relationship between Proust and Petrarch: 'This subjectivity is the central thread in twentieth-century French cultural consciousness, both literary and artistic, whose antecedents go as far back as the humanist tradition of Boccaccio and Petrarch.' See Angelo Caranfa, *Proust: The Creative Silence* (London: Associated University Presses, 1990), p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Jean Rousset identifies the importance of the first sight of the beloved as part of a Petrarchan tradition, in his discussion of Proust's protagonist's first glimpse of Gilberte, commenting that this takes place in the surroundings of a 'jardin en fleurs et haie d'aubépines, qui renvoient au décor printannier de

yet none of these comments are more than passing and need not detain us here. I cite criticism on mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust individually as relevant in the course of each chapter and do not attempt here any comprehensive list of such critical works. Since a critical focus on Dante and Proust is much rarer than that on Dante and Petrarch but still significant, contributions to such an area of research are now assessed, bearing in mind declarations, such as Bowie's, that Dante is 'an unexorcisable phantom'<sup>51</sup> within the *Recherche*, as well as more general comments on the *Recherche* and the *Commedia* such as the persuasive and perceptive assertion of Yves Bonnefoy that 'Ces deux itinéraires de l'âme sont de même ampleur autant que de même visée, ils se répondent d'une rive à l'autre de la pensée certes tempétueuse de l'Occident.'<sup>52</sup>

### *Critical literature on Dante and Proust*

The first article to approach the topic of Dante and Proust remains one of the most helpful pieces of comparative criticism on the two authors: Samuel Borton's self-proclaimed 'Tentative Essay'.<sup>53</sup> His acknowledgement that 'The perception of analogy between these two great literary works insinuates itself gradually and persistently in the mind' is, it seems, a

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l'*inannamoramento* des sonnettistes, de Pétrarque à Ronsard'. See Jean Rousset, 'Les Premières Rencontres', in *Recherche de Proust*, ed. by Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov (Paris: Seuil, 1980), pp. 40-54 (p. 42).

<sup>49</sup> Arnaud Tripet, speaking of Petrarch's *Epistula metrica* I, 14, writes that 'Pétrarque se comporte d'abord comme le héros proustien au début du *Temps perdu* ; il se tourne vers des objets qui ne sont pas encore orientés', *Pétrarque ou la connaissance de soi* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), p. 114.

<sup>50</sup> Magda E. Lempart has suggested that 'Comme Pétrarque, Proust aurait pu s'accuser d'*acedia*, cette torpeur spirituelle à laquelle est lié un sentiment de souffrance', *La Transposition esthétique des valeurs chrétiennes dans l'œuvre de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1968), p. 51. See also, on Proust and *acedia*, Edward Bizub, *Proust et le moi divisé: la 'Recherche': creuset de la psychologie expérimentale (1874-1914)* (Geneva: Droz, 2006), p. 210, and on Proust's protagonist as slothful, Barbara Bucknall, *The Religion of Art in Proust* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969), p. 160.

<sup>51</sup> Malcolm Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars* (London: FontanaPress, 1998), p. 105.

<sup>52</sup> Yves Bonnefoy, 'Le Paradoxe du traducteur', preface to Jacqueline Risset, *Traduction et mémoire poétique: Dante, Scève, Rimbaud, Proust* (Paris: Hermann, 2007), pp. 7-15 (p. 15).

<sup>53</sup> Samuel Borton, 'A Tentative Essay on Dante and Proust', *Delaware Notes*, 31 (1958), 33-42.

fairly common experience amongst readers of both works, as I summarise below.<sup>54</sup> Borton's essay mainly concerns a discernment of similarities between the *Vita nuova* and the *Recherche* in terms of shared themes (such as love), but also as regards structure. In the latter respect, Borton's argument is instructive for my Epilogue, which considers the quest for closure in the structuring of the *Vita nuova*, the *Recherche*, and the *Canzoniere*. Borton's article explicitly forms the basis of the Dantean pages of Richard Bales's *Proust and the Middle Ages*, a critical work whose importance for this thesis is self-evident. In the Epilogue, I explore Bales's own suggestion that Proust and Dante shared a 'rather exalted conception of the book as such'.<sup>55</sup> One edited volume continuing in the footsteps of Bales's research focus has recently been published,<sup>56</sup> and another is forthcoming.<sup>57</sup>

Other contributions to a reading of Dante and Proust include a useful article by Gemma Pappot reviewing the six explicit references to Dante and the *Commedia* in the *Recherche*,<sup>58</sup> and Anne Teulade's 'Proust et l'épopée de Dante', which is a more thorough analysis of Proust's references to Dante in his novel, letters, and criticism.<sup>59</sup> Given the comprehensiveness of such surveys, it is not necessary to list here all such references, although it is worthwhile highlighting that Proust's identification of himself or his

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<sup>54</sup> Borton, 'A Tentative Essay on Dante and Proust', p. 33.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Bales, *Proust and the Middle Ages* (Geneva: Droz, 1975), p. 138. Comparisons between Dante and Proust in terms of their attitudes towards time, history, and the book also crop up in Gabriel Josipovici's *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1971), especially '2. The World as a Book', pp. 25-51.

<sup>56</sup> *Au seuil de la modernité: Proust, Literature and the Arts: Essays in Memory of Richard Bales*, ed. by Nigel Harkness and Marion Schmid (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011). Of particular Dantean interest in this volume is Catherine O'Beirne's 'Proust and the Carlylean Mediation of Dante', pp. 17-37.

<sup>57</sup> *Proust et le Moyen Âge*, ed. by Sophie Duval and Miren Lacassagne (proceedings from conference days held at Bordeaux and Reims in 2010). Also forthcoming as regards studies on Dante and Proust is Adam Watt's 'L'Air du temps: Dante and Proust', *La Parola del Testo* (Società Dantesca Italiana), which stems from a paper at a 'Dante in France' study day at Leeds University, 17 September 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Gemma Pappot, 'L'*Inferno* de Proust à la lumière de Dante: remarques sur les renvois à la *Divina Commedia* de Dante dans *A la recherche du temps perdu*', *Marcel Proust aujourd'hui*, 1 (2003), 91-118.

<sup>59</sup> Anne Teulade, 'Proust et l'épopée de Dante', in *Proust, l'étranger*, ed. by Karen Haddad-Wotling and Vincent Ferré (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 15-36. See also the article 'Dante (Alighieri, Dante dit) [1265-1321]' by A. Beretta Anguissola, in *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, ed. by Annick Bouillaguet and Brian G. Rogers (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), pp. 283-4.

protagonist with Dante suggests a surprising degree of emotional involvement with the Florentine poet. This identification is most striking firstly in Proust's decision to sign off a book review with the pseudonym Marc el Dante (which Marie Miguet-Ollagnier has glossed as Proust 'se glissant avec humour dans l'écrivain du Trecento').<sup>60</sup> Secondly, in the first volume of the *Recherche* itself, Proust's protagonist's observation of a water lily swaying in the current of the river Vivonne is identified with Dante-pilgrim's watchful journey through *Inferno*:

Tel était ce nénuphar, pareil aussi à quelqu'un de ces malheureux dont le tourment singulier, qui se répète indéfiniment durant l'éternité, excitait la curiosité de Dante et dont il se serait fait raconter plus longuement les particularités et la cause par le supplicié lui-même, si Virgile, s'éloignant à grands pas, ne l'avait forcé à le rattraper au plus vite, comme moi mes parents. (*ALR* I:167)<sup>61</sup>

Such moments of perceived Dantean identity are certainly persuasive evidence of the validity of reading Dante alongside Proust, although their significance remains elusive.

Continuing this review of Dante-Proust criticism, Walter Strauss's article on 'Proust-Giotto-Dante' is particularly notable since Strauss himself, in *Proust and Literature*, had largely limited his consideration of Proust's literary interests to the French seventeenth

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<sup>60</sup> Marie Miguet-Ollagnier, 'Les Cités maudites: fondements mythiques et versions romanesques', *Bulletin d'informations proustiennes*, 32 (2001), 91-105 (p. 95). The review in question was of Lucien Daudet's *Le Chemin mort*, and was originally published in *L'Intransigeant*, 8 September 1908, and reprinted in *CSB*, pp. 550-2. Unfortunately, the journal seemingly failed to pick up on the Dantean allusion, transforming Proust's *nom de plume* into the less elegant Marc Éodonte. Lucien Daudet is perhaps associated with Dante in Proust's mind because of the following anecdote which the former relates: 'Mon père avait un valet de chambre italien, nommé Pietro, un vieil homme excellent, à qui Marcel Proust serrait toujours la main quand il le voyait, provoquant ses bavardages interminables, qui allaient de la Société romaine à Dante, dont Pietro savait par cœur de longs passages.' Lucien Daudet, *Autour de soixante lettres de Marcel Proust*, Cahiers Marcel Proust, 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 1929), p. 26.

<sup>61</sup> This passage is discussed particularly by: Carolyn Clark Breen, 'Proust, Dante, and Vergil: An Incident of Intertextuality along the Vivonne', *Classical and Modern Literature: A Quarterly*, 9:1 (Autumn 1988), 73-8; J. Theodore Johnson, Jr, 'Proust's "Impressionism" Reconsidered in the Light of the Visual Arts of the Twentieth Century', in *Twentieth Century French Fiction: Essays for Germaine Brée*, ed. by George Stambolian (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1975), pp. 27-56; Jennifer Rushworth, 'Proust's Ruskinian Reveries on Dante and Florence', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 35:4 (September 2013), 419-34. Bowie suggests the Dantean point of reference is *Inf.XXIII.145-8* (*Proust Among the Stars*, p. 37). Daniel Gunn, *Psychoanalysis and Fiction: An Exploration of Literary and Psychoanalytic Borders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), draws on this passage as illustrating the repetition of *Inferno*, with which he argues Proust's narrator identifies (see pp. 147-8).

and nineteenth centuries.<sup>62</sup> Jean-Yves Tadié's very brief 'Note sur Proust et Dante' remains pertinent, even though the critic concludes that 'les preuves manquent, pour ce parallèle à la Plutarque entre deux poètes épiques'.<sup>63</sup> That a comparative study of two authors can be valid and productive despite a lack of 'preuves' or evidence is one of the demonstrable aims of this thesis. Such an affirmation is also the catalyst for Karlheinz Stierle's *Zeit und Werk: Prousts ,A la recherche du temps perdu' und Dantes ,Commedia'*, the only existing book-length study on the two authors and which has received less attention than it deserves due no doubt to the language barrier it poses for many Dantisti and Proustians alike.<sup>64</sup>

Two recent articles in *Poetics Today* have also reignited debate over the effectiveness of comparing Dante and Proust. On the one hand, Gian Balsamo asserts that just as in the *Commedia* Dante-pilgrim becomes Dante-narrator at the end through divine intervention and the help of Beatrice, so Proust's protagonist at the end of the *Recherche* becomes the narrator of the book we have just read, thanks to the apparition of Mlle de Saint-Loup in *Le Temps retrouvé*.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, however, Joshua Landy rejects any such perceived consonance and challenges in particular the pivotal role Balsamo attributes to the marginal character of Mlle de Saint-Loup.<sup>66</sup> My own position is closer to that of Landy, in the sense that my conclusions, elaborated in the Epilogue, tend to bear out the distinguishing of overwhelming and insurmountable differences between the literary projects

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<sup>62</sup> Walter A. Strauss, 'Proust-Giotto-Dante', *Dante Studies*, 96 (1978), 163-85, and *Proust and Literature: The Novelist as Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957). For a different perspective on Proust's relationship to medieval literature, see J.H. Watkins, 'Proust and Medieval Literature', in *Studies in Modern French Literature Presented to P. Mansell Jones* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), pp. 326-32. Also on Proust and Giotto, see J. Theodore Johnson, Jr, 'Proust and Giotto: Foundations for an Allegorical Interpretation of *A la recherche du temps perdu*', in *Marcel Proust: A Critical Panorama*, ed. by Larkin B. Price (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 168-205.

<sup>63</sup> Jean-Yves Tadié, 'Note sur Proust et Dante', *Adam International Review*, 394-6 (1976), 61-2 (p. 62).

<sup>64</sup> Karlheinz Stierle, *Zeit und Werk: Prousts ,A la recherche du temps perdu' und Dantes ,Commedia'* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2008). See also Hans-Robert Jauss, 'Erleuchtete und entzogene Zeit: Eine Lectura Dantis: VI. Die *Divina Commedia* im Lichte von *A la recherche du temps perdu*', in *Das Fest*, ed. by Walter Haug and Rainer Warning (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1989), pp. 64-91 (pp. 85-91).

<sup>65</sup> Gian Balsamo, 'The Fiction of Marcel Proust's Autobiography', *Poetics Today*, 28:4 (Winter 2007), 573-606.

<sup>66</sup> Joshua Landy, 'A Beatrice for Proust?', *Poetics Today*, 28:4 (Winter 2007), 607-18.

of Dante and Proust. Yet, like Balsamo, I continue to believe in the usefulness of comparisons, since it is the act of comparing or indeed contrasting Dante and Proust that enables the particular nature of each author and their concepts of writing, sublimation, and epiphany (as the Epilogue charts) to be revealed most clearly.

Amongst this critical *compte rendu*, three further individuals deserve special mention: Roland Barthes, Wallace Fowlie, and George Steiner. Barthes is a recurrent presence in this thesis as a Proustian, theorist of mourning, and promoter of Dante-Proust comparisons. In *Le Plaisir du texte*, Barthes declares unambiguously:

Je comprends que l'œuvre de Proust est, du moins pour moi, l'œuvre de référence, la *mathésis* générale, le *mandala* de toute la cosmogonie littéraire [...] : Proust, c'est ce qui me vient, ce n'est pas ce que j'appelle ; ce n'est pas une 'autorité' ; simplement *un souvenir circulaire*. Et c'est bien cela l'inter-texte : l'impossibilité de vivre hors du texte infini.<sup>67</sup>

In Chapter Three, I draw on Barthes's *Journal de deuil*, posthumously published fragmentary notes which he wrote daily after his mother's death, as a way of conceiving the relationship between literary representations and personal experience of grief.<sup>68</sup> In Chapter Two, another Barthesian text of fragmentary writing, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (from which I have already cited a dynamic definition of discourse), supports my analysis of Kristevan fragmented, melancholic language in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), pp. 50–1. On the relationship between Barthes and Proust, see: Johnnie Gratton, *Expressivism: The Vicissitudes of a Theory in the Writing of Proust and Barthes* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000); Malcolm Bowie, 'Barthes on Proust' and Lawrence D. Kritzman, 'Barthes's Way: *Un amour de Proust*', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14:2 (2001), 513–18 and 535–43 respectively; Jean-François Chevrier, 'Proust par Roland Barthes', in *Prétexte: Roland Barthes: Colloque de Cerisy*, ed. by Antoine Compagnon (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 2003), pp. 413–38; Kathrin Yacavone, 'The "Scattered" Proust: On Barthes's Reading of the *Recherche*', in *When Familiar Meanings Dissolve: Essays in French Studies in Memory of Malcolm Bowie*, ed. by Gill Rye and Naomi Segal (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 219–31; Thomas Baldwin, 'On Barthes on Proust', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 48:3 (2012), 274–87.

<sup>68</sup> Roland Barthes, *Journal de deuil: 26 octobre 1977 – 15 septembre 1979*, ed. by Nathalie Léger (Paris: Seuil/Imec, 2009).

<sup>69</sup> For a Proustian perspective on fragmentation, see Luc Fraisse, *Le Processus de la création chez Marcel Proust: le fragment expérimental* (Paris: José Corti, 1988).

Even more strikingly for my comparative project, Barthes argues that Proust and Dante are comparable in that the start of writing for both is a reaction to the experience of death, which he defines as for Proust the death of his mother, and for Dante the death of the maternal Beatrice. Barthes writes that ‘le “milieu de la vie” [a contraction of the first line of *Infèrno*, ‘Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita’] n’est peut-être jamais rien d’autre que ce moment où l’on découvre que la mort est réelle, et non plus seulement redoutable.’<sup>70</sup> Readers are thereby encouraged to note that both Proust’s *Recherche* and Dante’s *Commedia* start from a dark, barren space (whether the wood or the bedroom) in which the subject has lost any sense of self and is wholly isolated, caught between sleeping and waking and searching for a new way of reconnecting with the external world. The origin of writing is, in each case, both a ‘deathscape’<sup>71</sup> and a ‘dreamscape’.<sup>72</sup> Yet, as I suggest in the Epilogue, the endings of the *Recherche* and the *Commedia* are divergent. The outcome of writing is in the end very different for the two authors, and the open-endedness and failure at the conclusion of the *Vita nuova* are, I argue, much closer to the Proustian aesthetic than the *Commedia*’s triumphant finale of a vision of the whole universe and union with God.

The criticism of Wallace Fowlie testifies, like the writing of Barthes, to a sustained if intermittent interest in synchronised readings of Dante and Proust. In his book on Proust, Fowlie compares Proust’s novel to Dante’s poem not only in terms of sheer size and number of characters, but more significantly in terms of the combination, in each narrative, of the

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<sup>70</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘« Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure »’, in *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), pp. 333–46 (p. 342). See also his posthumously published lectures, *La Préparation du roman I et II: notes de cours et de séminaires au Collège de France 1978–1979 et 1979–1980*, ed. by Nathalie Léger (Paris: Seuil, 2003), especially pp. 25–8, ‘Le « milieu » de la vie’ (with reference to Dante, Proust, and mourning), and where it is reiterated that ‘le milieu de ma vie, quel que soit l’accident, ce n’est rien d’autre que ce moment où l’on découvre la mort comme réelle’ (p. 28).

<sup>71</sup> The term is borrowed from Malcolm Bowie’s description of the start of Proust’s novel, *Proust Among the Stars*, p. 271.

<sup>72</sup> The term is Peter S. Hawkins’s characterisation of *Infèrno* I, in *Dante: A Brief History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 34.

literal and the symbolic.<sup>73</sup> More strikingly, in his introduction to his later study of *Inferno*, Fowlie openly acknowledges, as strange as it may seem, that ‘*A Reading of Dante’s “Inferno”*’ was undertaking to complement and offset an earlier book, *A Reading of Proust*, and he goes on to assert that ‘the relating of Dante to contemporary literature is an obligation’.<sup>74</sup> Where relevant, Fowlie takes the opportunity of comparing Dante and Proust in specific details such as the death of Bergotte in the *Recherche* and Dante-pilgrim’s meeting with Brunetto Latini in *Inferno*.<sup>75</sup> He is, moreover, perceptive in placing the emphasis on Proust’s relationship with Dante on *Inferno*, rather than on *Purgatorio* or *Paradiso*, which is true to the majority of the explicit references to the *Commedia* in the *Recherche*. Fowlie’s work thus to an extent supports my evaluation of the relationship between Dante and Proust undertaken in Chapter Three, and which shows that Proust is worlds apart from Dante because of Dante’s faith in resurrection and reunion, and that *Inferno* is the only possible common ground. Even then, however, I do suggest that Proust’s hellish depictions are in the end closer to a Petrarchan, subjective, interior, living Hell, rather than Dante’s communal, theologised *Inferno* (which is, nonetheless, both worldly and otherworldly). Fowlie’s ‘Epiphanies in Proust and Dante’ is an important precedent for the Epilogue’s concern with this same topic,<sup>76</sup> although I tend to stress the differences between the epiphanies in the two authors, and, unlike Fowlie, propose a dual reading of the reappearance of Beatrice at the end of the *Vita nuova* and the Proustian episode of the ‘*intermittences du cœur*’, that is, the reappearance via involuntary memory of the grandmother in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*.

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<sup>73</sup> Fowlie, *A Reading of Proust* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1967), p. 41.

<sup>74</sup> Fowlie, *A Reading of Dante’s ‘Inferno’* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 2 and 4.

<sup>75</sup> Fowlie, *A Reading of Dante’s ‘Inferno’*, p. 225.

<sup>76</sup> Fowlie, ‘Epiphanies in Proust and Dante’, in *The Art of the Proustian Novel Reconsidered*, ed. by Lawrence D. Joiner (Rock Hill: Winthrop College, 1979), pp. 1-9.

Finally, George Steiner (whose concept of triangulated readings of texts and authors I have already mentioned) on more than one occasion invokes Dante and Proust in conjunction, declaring, for instance, that ‘Dante and Proust, like no others, give us the gossip of eternity.’<sup>77</sup> Steiner, like Barthes, places the emphasis of Dante-Proust comparisons on their shared concern with the experience of loss and mourning, asking ‘Could there be any more acute understanding than Dante’s or Proust’s – so akin in this respect – of the manifold ways in which the worlds of the dead reach into those of the living?’<sup>78</sup> This question is at the heart of my consideration of posthumous epiphanies in the Epilogue. More generally, Steiner is a valuable ally for comparative studies, arguing that ‘Criticism delights in affinity and the far leap of example’ and ‘that literature should be taught and interpreted in a comparative way’.<sup>79</sup>

Besides such valuable contributions, it should be admitted that many passing references to Dante in studies on Proust remain rather superficial and far too general to be of any real value. This is most often the case with references to variously chosen areas of the *Recherche* which a particular critic wishes to associate with infernal, purgatorial, or paradisiacal realms. Dominique Fernandez is guilty of such a charge:

Proust a écrit une *Divine Comédie*, mais une *Divine Comédie* à rebours. Deux fois à rebours puisque, d’une part, à la différence de Dante, Proust se met du côté des réprouvés, du côté des parias, et que, d’autre part, le voyage commence par le Paradis de l’enfance, se poursuit par le Purgatoire de la mondanité et s’achève dans l’Enfer du sexe, avant une tardive et laborieuse remontée vers les étoiles, vues comme du fonds d’un puits.<sup>80</sup>

The reference to Dante is unnecessary since the *Commedia*’s distinctive system has to be wholly dismantled in order to be relevant to Proust, and the references to Hell, Purgatory,

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<sup>77</sup> Steiner, *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 172.

<sup>78</sup> Steiner, *Antigones* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 232.

<sup>79</sup> Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1966* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> Dominique Fernandez, *L’Arbre jusqu’aux racines: psychanalyse et création* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1972), p. 333.

and Paradise might just as well stand alone as general cultural concepts devoid of any Dantean inflection.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, as I discuss in Chapter Three, it should be acknowledged that the models of the afterlife that Proust had in mind when composing the *Recherche* are more consistently Homeric or Virgilian than Dantean. The following comparison by a different critic shows a greater familiarity with Dante, but remains similarly vague and fails to engage fully with the important structural differences that such a connection invites:

The opening of *Le Temps retrouvé* represents the nadir of the protagonist's spiritual progress. Marcel has attained the very center of the Inferno, but, like Dante, he must first experience the most extreme desolation before discovering that he is in fact on the road to salvation.<sup>82</sup>

Even Kristeva, a touchstone for this thesis, gives in to the temptation to draw unsubstantiated analogies between Proust and Dante, calling Albertine a 'moderne Béatrice'.<sup>83</sup> While I agree with Kristeva that the centrality of the death of the beloved in the *Vita nuova* and the *Recherche* does call for joint consideration, I believe that the phrase is a contradiction in terms: if Albertine is modern she cannot truly be a Beatrice. I concur with Henriette Levillain that any twentieth-century Beatrice-figure would be a far cry from her glorious medieval predecessor. Levillain notes that 'Même Béatrice au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle a pris des rides',<sup>84</sup> thereby suggesting that Dante's Beatrice necessarily appears, to most modern readers, if not an outdated model at least impossibly old. Indeed, as I discuss in Chapter Two, Beatrice is already consigned to an unreachable past by Petrarch whose love for Laura is

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<sup>81</sup> A similar complaint might be made about the following comment: 'Se – come fa lo stesso Proust – paragonassimo la *Recherche* alla *Commedia* dantesca, coglieremmo, da principio, la differenza più lampante: alla fine del viaggio proustiano non c'è un Paradiso, ma soltanto un'ipotesi di Paradiso, incerta e quasi timorosa d'esser formulata mentre ogni cosa attorno va in sfacelo.' Eleonora Sparvoli, *Contro il corpo: Proust e il romanzo immateriale* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1997), p. 49.

<sup>82</sup> Steven G. Kellman, *The Self-Begetting Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 13.

<sup>83</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Le Temps sensible: Proust et l'expérience littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 148.

<sup>84</sup> Henriette Levillain, 'Dante: une poétique pour le XX<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 308 (October-December 2003), 391-402 (p. 394). See also, on the modern reception of Dante, Nick Havely, *Dante's Modern Afterlife: Reception and Response from Blake to Heaney* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), and *Metamorphosing Dante*, ed. by Gragnolati and others.

presented only intermittently as a road to salvation and instead principally as, on the one hand, a sinful temptation and, on the other, a source of poetry.

Despite such less convincing comments, this review of critical references to Dante in Proust reveals that the topic of this thesis is more critically orthodox and fruitful than might at first be thought. Proust in Dante remains, however, less studied, and Gianfranco Contini's suggestion that 'Marcel Proust [...] serve di metafora per un discorso non del tutto elementare su Dante'<sup>85</sup> has gone largely unexplored. The innovation of this thesis lies perhaps in its commitment to comparative readings that are mutually illuminating, readings which do not privilege one side only of any comparison, but rather explore how twin (or even triple) readings can be reciprocally revealing in a balanced fashion. Before articulating the understanding of comparative literature as contrastive reading and as a work of interpolation (as this thesis ultimately propounds), I briefly reflect on the role of psychoanalysis in literary criticism. This role is, after all, a contentious one that requires some justification and explanation.

### *The role of psychoanalysis in literary criticism*

At worst, psychoanalytical literary criticism has resulted in attempts to diagnose the life and mind of the author (who is directly equated with his or her protagonist), in a manner that offends both Proustians, who follow Proust's lead in rejecting Sainte-Beuve's insistently biographical method of criticism,<sup>86</sup> and post-structuralists, who are sensitive to Barthes's declaration that the author is dead.<sup>87</sup> At best, psychoanalytical literary criticism is a two-way

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<sup>85</sup> Gianfranco Contini, *Varianti e altra linguistica: Una raccolta di saggi 1938-1968* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), p. 335.

<sup>86</sup> In this respect Milton L. Miller's *Nostalgia: A Psychoanalytic Study of Marcel Proust* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1956) is surprisingly un-Proustian.

<sup>87</sup> Barthes, 'La Mort de l'auteur', in *Le Bruissement de la langue*, pp. 63-9.

interrogation; literature questions psychoanalysis just as psychoanalysis questions literature. In the words of Malcolm Bowie, ideally '[p]sychoanalysis [...] confers privilege not upon any one system, but upon the space between and upon transforming movements across it.'<sup>88</sup>

The relevance of psychoanalysis to literary criticism might proceed from a recognition both that many of Freud's case studies are drawn from literary examples and that psychoanalysis is in its very essence literary in its formal dependence on writing.<sup>89</sup> In the words of Harold Bloom, 'Freud is closer to Proust than to Einstein';<sup>90</sup> in the words of Daniel Gunn, 'psychoanalysis is itself, among other things, a mode of *writing*, which bears certain similarities with (if also some differences from) the writing of a Kafka, a Dante or an Eliot'.<sup>91</sup> Freud's interest in Renaissance literature has also been adduced as evidence of the compatibility of psychoanalysis and early modern studies.<sup>92</sup> More generally, but in a similar vein, Bruce Holsinger has shown how many modern theorists have medievalist backgrounds, thereby encouraging the reading of medieval texts through such twentieth-century thinkers.<sup>93</sup>

Furthermore, both psychoanalysis and literature have in common a minute, painstaking attention to language, particularly to instances where language deviates from the norm or what is expected and thereby invites interpretation. They also share a belief in the

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<sup>88</sup> Malcolm Bowie, *Psychoanalysis and the Future of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 101.

<sup>89</sup> See Graham Frankland, *Freud's Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Patrick J. Mahony, *Freud as Writer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), and Bowie, *Psychoanalysis and the Future of Theory*, pp. 55-85.

<sup>90</sup> Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1987-88: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 146.

<sup>91</sup> Gunn, *Psychoanalysis and Fiction*, p. 36.

<sup>92</sup> See *Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature*, ed. by Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), but also Stephen Greenblatt, '10. Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture', in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. by Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 210-24.

<sup>93</sup> Bruce Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). See also R.A. Shoaf, 'Medieval Studies: After Derrida after Heidegger', in *Sign Sentence Discourse Language: Medieval Thought and Literature*, ed. by Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989), pp. 9-30.

power of language to ring changes, whether such changes are therapeutic (as in the ‘talking cure’, which I discuss in Chapter One in relation to Dante’s *Purgatorio*) or traumatic (of which the painful speech of *Inferno* or many of Petrarch’s poems are striking examples). In this respect, Adam Phillips helpfully explores the tendency of psychoanalysis to turn to literature – rather than scientific discourse – as a model which ensures the meaningfulness and potency of language, so central to its self-construction of authority.<sup>94</sup>

The relationship between psychoanalysis and literature that this thesis upholds is one of reciprocal interrogation and mutual involvement. It resonates therefore with Shoshana Felman’s suggestion, regarding this dialectic, that:

The notion of *application* would be replaced by the radically different notion of *implication*: bringing analytical questions to bear upon literary questions, *involving* psychoanalysis in the scene of literary analysis, the interpreter’s role would here be, not to *apply* to the text an acquired science, a preconceived knowledge, but to act as a go-between, to *generate implications* between literature and psychoanalysis – to explore, bring to light and articulate the various (indirect) ways in which the two domains do indeed *implicate each other*, each one finding itself enlightened, informed, but also affected, displaced, by the other.<sup>95</sup>

More generally, I also appreciate the friction of Cary Howie’s notion of claustrophilia, which is offered as ‘a critical practice that would rub medieval and modern texts together’.<sup>96</sup> Finally, Jean-Charles Huchet helpfully highlights as regards the confrontation of literature and psychoanalysis that:

Il ne s’agit pas de tirer le Moyen Âge vers la modernité, de nier son altérité pour asseoir l’universalité de la psychanalyse, ou d’assassiner cette altérité en la pliant à une conceptualisation exogène, mais de respecter, voire de renforcer, une spécificité pour la traverser, pour entendre au cœur de cette différence ce qui la déborde et aspire à être pris en charge autrement.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Adam Phillips, *Promises, Promises*, pp. 1-34.

<sup>95</sup> Shoshana Felman, ‘To Open the Question’, in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. by Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 5-10 (pp. 8-9, emphases in the original).

<sup>96</sup> Cary Howie, *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Jean-Charles Huchet, *Littérature médiévale et psychanalyse: pour une clinique littéraire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), p. 8.

What unites these three critics in their approach to psychoanalytical, literary readings is an attention to telling differences, dissonance, and displacement amidst the postulation of shared attributes and concerns. Such an attention to confluence and contrast is at the heart of this present study.

While successful psychoanalytical readings of Dante and Petrarch are beginning to emerge,<sup>98</sup> it is unsurprising that Proust as a contemporary of Freud should have inspired many more such interpretations.<sup>99</sup> Most recently, Jean-Yves Tadié explores in a summary fashion how Proust and Freud share a striking number of concerns, such as dreams, childhood, the unconscious, the irrationality of memory, and the work of mourning.<sup>100</sup> Proust's own admission that the *Recherche* constitutes 'un essai d'une suite de "Romans de l'Inconscient"'<sup>101</sup> highlights the common ground between the two, and such mutual interests are perhaps in part to be expected given that the two share the same European-wide intellectual and cultural *Zeitgeist*. Proust asserts that he has not read any of Freud's

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<sup>98</sup> See, for instance, Gary P. Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003) and Stefano Agosti, *Gli occhi le chiome: Per una lettura psicoanalitica del 'Canzoniere' di Petrarca* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1993).

<sup>99</sup> General works of note are Randolph Splitter, *Proust's 'Recherche': A Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) and Philippe Willemart, *Proust poète et psychanalyste* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999). The *madeleine* episode has been the catalyst for a surprising number of psychoanalytical, often oedipal interpretations. See Serge Doubrovsky, *La Place de la madeleine: écriture et fantasme chez Proust* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1974), and also: Philippe Lejeune, 'Écriture et sexualité', *Europe*, 502-3 (February-March 1971), 113-43; Albert Sonnenfeld, 'Érotique madeleine', *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 19:4 (1972), 461-9. The erotic undertones of much Proustian imagery are elaborated by Michael Riffaterre, 'The Intertextual Unconscious', in *The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Françoise Meltzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 211-25.

<sup>100</sup> Jean-Yves Tadié, *Le Lac inconnu: entre Proust et Freud* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012). Malcolm Bowie also constructs a list of possible points of comparison in 'Freud and Proust', before focusing on errors and slips, and bisexuality, in *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 67-97 (pp. 68-9). Other important studies of the two include: Jacques Rivière, *Quelques progrès dans l'étude du cœur humain: Freud et Proust* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1926); Jean-Louis Baudry, *Proust, Freud et l'autre* (Paris: Minuit, 1984); Pierre Bayard, 'Lire Freud avec Proust', in *Marcel Proust visiteur des psychanalystes* (= *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 63 (May-June 1999)), pp. 393-406.

<sup>101</sup> '[Swann expliqué par Proust]', *CSB*, pp. 557-9 (p. 558). See Robin MacKenzie, *The Unconscious in Proust's 'A la recherche du temps perdu'* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2000).

work: 'Si je n'ai pas compris la phrase sur Freud c'est que je n'ai pas lu ses livres'.<sup>102</sup> Yet one wonders whether Proust is protesting his ignorance so much precisely because he has sensed the possible similarities between his own literary enterprise and Freud's work.

Equally importantly, Edward Bizub has situated Proust and Freud in terms of their shared background of medical and psychological discourse, bearing in mind especially Proust's father being a key figure in the medical profession at the time.<sup>103</sup> Interpretations of the *Recherche* based on Melanie Klein's theories including that of depression and creativity have also been elaborated.<sup>104</sup> As such, Klein is perhaps a conspicuous absence from my thesis, which in theoretical terms jumps from Freud to Derrida and Kristeva with very little regard to the intervening theorists, except passing remarks to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in Chapter Three. Jacques Lacan is another such notable omission. As justification for such omissions, I highlight the 'practical' exploration of melancholic language in Kristeva (whose focus is often literary) and Derrida (whose reflections are based on personal experience), and which I find less marked in Klein and Lacan.<sup>105</sup> This is not to say that other texts and other theorists could not have been chosen that would have been similarly instructive.

### *Rationale and methodology*

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<sup>102</sup> *Corr.* XX, p. 447, letter 263, to Roger Allard [peu avant le 13 septembre 1921].

<sup>103</sup> Bizub, *Proust et le moi divisé*.

<sup>104</sup> Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 7-28; Anna M. Elsner, 'Tracing the Presence of an Absence: Mourning and Creation from "Les Intermittences du cœur" to *Le Temps retrouvé*', in *Le Temps retrouvé Eighty Years After/80 ans après: Critical Essays/Essais critiques*, ed. by Adam Watt (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 279-92; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Weather in Proust*, ed. by Jonathan Goldberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). Elsner also draws on Klein in 'Mourning and Creativity', pp. 139-53. A key text by Klein on mourning is 'Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States (1940)', in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. by Juliet Mitchell (New York: The Free Press, 1986), pp. 146-74.

<sup>105</sup> See, though, Bowie, 'Lacan and Literature', in *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, pp. 136-63, and Elsner, who highlights the importance of a Lacanian perspective on Freud's *fort/da* game in 'Mourning and Creativity', pp. 154-60.

This thesis can be broadly situated in the realm of comparative literature, a discipline which might take as its mantra the following observation by T. S. Eliot:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.<sup>106</sup>

Yet the label ‘comparative literature’ seems to overlook the first of Eliot’s two approaches, ‘contrast and comparison’, in favour of the second term. I propose, therefore, to reformulate comparative literature as a process of contrastive reading.

The *OED*’s first entry for the verb ‘to compare’ is ‘The action, or an act, of comparing, likening, or representing as similar’. Comparative literature can thus be defined as the act of representing two literary works as alike, finding their common ground, and so on. Instead, I would like to propose the concept of contrastive literature,<sup>107</sup> drawing on the *OED*’s first entry for ‘to contrast’ in modern English usage: ‘To put in contrast, to place in such juxtaposition as to bring strongly out differences of form, colour, etc., and thus to produce a striking effect.’ This is precisely my strategy and aim in juxtaposing Dante, Petrarch, and Proust in this thesis. In Petrarch’s own words, ‘Nullo enim clarius modo unaqueque res quam contrario admota cognoscitur’, ‘*The clearest possible means of understanding a thing is to place it next to its opposite*’.<sup>108</sup> Comparative literature can risk being homogenising and reductive if reassuring in its ultimate quest to confirm the essential similarity of identity of different objects. As Samuel Beckett warns, ‘The danger is in the neatness of identifications’:

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<sup>106</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent (1919)’, in *Selected Prose*, ed. by John Hayward (London: Penguin, 1953), pp. 21–30 (p. 23).

<sup>107</sup> See also Michael Palencia-Roth, ‘Contrastive Literature’, in *Comparative Literature in the Nineties: ACLA Bulletin*, 24:2 (1993), 47–61.

<sup>108</sup> Petrarch, ‘De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia’/‘*On his own ignorance and that of many others*’, in *Invectives*, ed. and trans. by David Marsh (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 222–363 (pp. 294/95).

Must we wring the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon-hole, or modify the dimensions of that pigeon-hole for the satisfaction of the analogymongers? Literary criticism is not book-keeping.<sup>109</sup>

Contrastive literature, instead, is alive to the possibilities of non-conformism, heterogeneity, and radical otherness as a means of better understanding two or more irreducibly different texts.<sup>110</sup>

It is not that I wish to reject the validity of comparisons, which are often fruitful and enlightening in themselves. In Chapter Three, for instance, comparing Proust and Petrarch shows surprising points of consonance despite their historical distance from one another. On the other hand, attention to detail and nuance is vital. As Bowie warns, ‘If the comparison is to tell, the two writers cannot be allowed simply to merge’.<sup>111</sup> Thus in Chapter One my comparison of Dante’s *Purgatorio* with Freud’s work of mourning is largely harmonious, but tempered by an awareness of the radical differences between the two, particularly as regards worldview and religious outlook, and which renders the two models of mourning ultimately very different.

Moreover, it also seems important to challenge the second half of ‘comparative literature’, which thereby presumes that the object of comparison is literary. This becomes problematic when some of the texts in question are overtly theoretical, abstract, and non-literary, or when – as in the case of Derrida – they challenge genre boundaries altogether. It is for this reason that I prefer the more neutral term ‘reading(s)’. This thesis pursues, therefore, a project of contrastive reading that asserts the usefulness and excitement of

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<sup>109</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Our Exagmination round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (London: Faber and Faber, 1929), pp. 1-2. Beckett himself has frequent recourse to Dantean language in *Proust, and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1999).

<sup>110</sup> Other new, ambivalent, and nuanced views on the future of comparative literature can be found in *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, ed. by Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

<sup>111</sup> Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, p. 9.

polarised interpretation (Dante versus Proust, or indeed Petrarch versus Dante) as much as of association (Petrarch with Proust).

While it might be assumed that my choice of both medieval and modern texts would naturally result in an emphasis on difference, this thesis shows, perhaps surprisingly, that Dante and Petrarch are further apart in many ways than Petrarch and Proust. Such a discovery is not intended as a contribution to the well-established tradition of considering Petrarch as modern. Rather, I eschew the rhetoric of modernity that often plagues Petrarch in particular – Petrarch as first modern man, first modern poet, first modern historian, first modern gardener, first modern mountaineer, and so on<sup>112</sup> – in favour of an understanding of this paradoxical poet as, appropriately, caught between the opposing pulls of the medieval and the modern.<sup>113</sup> As Lombardi argues, it is essential to take into account ‘the unique position of Petrarch’s life and work on the cusp between the medieval and the early modern periods’.<sup>114</sup> Emilio Pasquini, similarly, speaks of Petrarch as ‘that lonely Janus-like figure, that amalgam of the medieval and the modern’.<sup>115</sup> Yet, ‘inbetween-ness’ is a constant of this project, not only as regards Petrarch, but also as regards both Dante (whose modernity has also been attested and whose poetry Shelley described as ‘the bridge thrown over the stream

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<sup>112</sup> See Nicholas Mann, *Petrarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 113, for a list of such common appellations. Mann himself seems to doubt the usefulness of some of the claims, but does in general endorse Petrarch as ‘the first modern man’.

<sup>113</sup> On ‘a thematics of intermediateness’ in Petrarch and some Petrarch scholarship, see Albert Russell Ascoli, ‘Petrarch’s Middle Age: Memory, Imagination, History, and the “Ascent of Mount Ventoux”’, *Stanford Italian Review*, 10 (1990), 5–43 (repr. in Albert Russell Ascoli, *A Local Habitation and a Name: Imagining Histories in the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), pp. 21–58). See also Theodor E. Mommsen, ‘Petrarch’s Conception of the “Dark Ages”’, *Speculum*, 17:2 (April 1942), 226–42. Ascoli situates Dante, too, between medieval and modern concepts of authority in *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>114</sup> Elena F. Lombardi, “‘I desire therefore I am’: Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* Between the Medieval and the Modern Notion of Desire”, in *Early Modern Medievalisms: The Interplay between Scholarly Reflection and Artistic Production*, ed. by Alicia C. Montoya, Sophie van Romburgh, and Wim van Anrooij (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 19–43 (p. 22).

<sup>115</sup> Emilio Pasquini, ‘Medieval Polarities: Dantism and Petrarchism’, in *Dante in Oxford: The Paget Toynbee Lectures*, ed. by Tristan Kay, Martin McLaughlin, and Michelangelo Zaccarello (London: Legenda, 2011), pp. 167–79 (p. 175).

of time, which unites the modern and antient [*sic*] world')<sup>116</sup> and Proust (who continues a nineteenth-century tradition of medievalism).<sup>117</sup> Indeed, 'inbetween-ness' is already inscribed within the very concept of the *Middle Ages*. These three authors have in common a complicated relationship with the Classical past (all three authors are great readers of Virgil and Ovid,<sup>118</sup> for instance) which chafes against and acts as catalyst for their modernising impulse and quest for original self-expression. No doubt this tension is less acute for Proust, for whom the Classical world is a distant past rather than a world to be Christianised (Dante) or a world to be rediscovered (Petrarch). Yet Proust is, like Dante, on the borderlines of two different centuries,<sup>119</sup> and like Petrarch, part of a wider cultural shift from the old to the new (for Petrarch, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance; for Proust, from nineteenth-century Romantic medievalising traditions to twentieth-century modernism). If the neologism is permissible, I would say that all three writers are in essence modieval, that is, always already engaged in a dialogue between modern and medieval languages, concepts, and worldviews, albeit to varying extents, even before the critical act of interpolation is undertaken.

My treatment of these three authors is diachronic and discontinuous, focusing on 'spots of time' rather than broad swathes of history.<sup>120</sup> In this fragmentary approach to

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<sup>116</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (London: Norton, 1977), pp. 478–508 (p. 498). Cited in Peter S. Hawkins, *Dante: A Brief History*, p. 137.

<sup>117</sup> See Bales, *Proust and the Middle Ages*, and also, on medievalism in nineteenth-century France, Janine R. Dakyns, *The Middle Ages in French Literature 1851–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>118</sup> Hence two chapters on Petrarch and Proust in *Ovidian Transformations: Essays on Ovid's 'Metamorphoses' and its Reception*, ed. by Philip Hardie, Alessandro Barchiesi, and Stephen Hinds (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1999), that is: Debra Hershkowitz, '11. The Creation of the Self in Ovid and Proust', pp. 182–96; Philip Hardie, '15. Ovid into Laura: Absent presences in the *Metamorphoses* and Petrarch's *Rime sparse*', pp. 254–70. See, as regards Dante, *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's 'Commedia'*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

<sup>119</sup> As regards Proust, see Antoine Compagnon, *Proust entre deux siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

<sup>120</sup> The phrase is from William Wordsworth's long poem *The Prelude*. See Jonathan Bishop, 'Wordsworth and the "Spots of Time"', *English Literary History*, 26:1 (March 1959), 44–65.

history I follow Michel Foucault's designation of genealogy as an anti-teleological, anti-synthetic, anti-evolutionary approach to the past:

Pour la généalogie, une indispensable retenue : repérer la singularité des événements, hors de toute finalité monotone ; les guetter là où on les attend le moins et dans ce qui passe pour n'avoir point d'histoire – les sentiments, l'amour, la conscience, les instincts ; saisir leur retour, non point pour tracer la courbe lente d'une évolution, mais pour retrouver les différentes scènes où ils ont joué des rôles différents ; définir même le point de leur lacune, le moment où ils n'ont pas eu lieu [...].

La généalogie exige donc la minutie du savoir, un grand nombre de matériaux entassés, de la patience.<sup>121</sup>

Instead of using the past to confirm our idea of the present, by projecting the present back into every moment of history, the past is used in an episodic, incomplete, fragmentary, but thus more truthful manner to challenge the present day.<sup>122</sup> Any idea of eternal human nature is discarded in favour of recognition of a complex, discontinuous history of emotions:<sup>123</sup>

L'instrument privilégié de la généalogie [...] ne doit être que cette acuité d'un regard qui distingue, répartit, disperse, laisse jouer les écarts et les marges – une sorte de regard dissociant capable de se dissocier lui-même et d'effacer l'unité de cet être humain qui est supposé le porter souverainement vers son passé.<sup>124</sup>

As regards Foucauldian genealogy, my decision to revert to Dante particularly in the Epilogue, with at last a sustained analysis of the *Vita nuova*, is revealing. By returning to the shortest and earliest of the works with which I am concerned, I want to subvert any sense of linear teleology in my analyses and to avoid giving the priority associated with the last word to the most modern text, that of Proust. The *Vita nuova* is an ideal point of arrival that reopens and further complicates the debate, rather than arbitrarily curtailing discussion. By returning to the *Vita nuova*, I resist the temptation of absolute neatness and circularity, as

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<sup>121</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire', in *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*, ed. by Suzanne Bachelard and others (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), pp. 145-72 (p. 145).

<sup>122</sup> Such an approach to the past is used by Chloë Taylor in *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the 'Confessing Animal'* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>123</sup> On the history of emotions see, for instance, William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>124</sup> Foucault, 'Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire', p. 159.

the ‘libello’ provides a complex, new view on the Dante of the *Commedia* (the first part of call in the thesis) as well as on Petrarch and Proust. In the Epilogue, I consider, by way of conclusion, important issues such as varying forms of epiphany, sublimation, and closure, the attitude towards *temps perdu*, and the image of the book in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust.

I wish finally, in this introduction, to suggest that the process of interpretation in this thesis be understood as a work of interpolation, a concept which I find useful in figuring the intertwining of the medieval and the modern on which this study relies. The prefix, ‘inter-’, of *interpolation* recalls my emphasis on ‘inbetween-ness’, as well as the need for both comparative and contrastive reading to be mutually, reciprocally enlightening. Furthermore, ‘to interpolate’ is defined by the *OED* as follows:

- †1. *trans.* To polish or furbish up; to put a fresh gloss on. *Obs. rare.*
- 2.
  - a. To alter or enlarge (a book or writing) by insertion of new matter; *esp.* to tamper with by making insertions which create false impressions as to the date or character of the work in question.
  - b. *transf.* To adulterate, temper, or modify, by new or foreign additions.
- 3. To introduce (words or passages) into a pre-existing writing; *esp.* to insert (spurious matter) in a genuine work without note or warning.

I have used this introduction to give ample warning of the insertion of modern texts (such as Freud) amongst medieval ones (such as Dante), but the concept of interpolation remains highly apt. The imagining of the insertion of new material as foreign and anachronistic, for instance, is appropriate in terms of the yoking together of texts in different languages and from different time periods on which this thesis depends. The first definition, meanwhile, although obsolete, captures the aim of such a procedure: putting a new gloss (explanation and comment, but also lustre) on old texts. The literary critic is, in this sense, deliberately an interpolator. In each chapter of this thesis I interpolate modern theory (Freud, Derrida, Kristeva), modern literature (Proust), and medieval literature (Dante and Petrarch), not to

mention medieval theory (for instance, Scholastic interpretations of the sin of *acedia*). Such an insistently and creatively interpolative critical practice is envisaged as a means of highlighting: the specificities of individual texts; the clarity and, at times, opacity provided by theoretical insights; and different ways in which medieval authors address their modern readers across the centuries. It is a way not only of speaking with the dead,<sup>125</sup> but also of making the dead speak to one other.

In this work of interpolation, Freud may appear like an interloper in Chapter One (on Dante), or Kristeva may be the interloper in Chapter Two (on Petrarch). Yet the concern that Proust might be the real interloper trespassing on the well-trodden ground of Dante-Petrarch studies undermines such identifications. Instead, the interloper becomes a destabilised category in this trespassing and transgressing of boundaries of language and genre. Leaping – loping – between modern and medieval authors, between theory and fiction, and between mourning and melancholia is made possible by careful, selective, revealing interpolation.

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‘But my melancholy spaniels quest, my game is sprung, & I must suddenly come down & follow.’<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> To borrow Stephen Greenblatt’s phrase from the start of *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, II (1990), p. 58.

# AIEEEEEEEJD

## **Chapter One.** **Dante's *Commedia* from Infernal Melancholia to a Purgatorial Work of Mourning**

Dante's belief in immortality is formal, precise and firm, almost as much so as that of a child, who thinks the dead will hear if you cry loud enough.<sup>127</sup>

This chapter focuses on the first two *cantiche* of Dante's *Commedia*, and proposes that they be read as bearing witness to two contrasting modes of grieving analogous to Freudian categories, on the one hand, endless melancholia in *Inferno*, and, on the other, the carrying out of a work of mourning in *Purgatorio*. Alongside this distinction, I present the case for *Purgatorio* as a type of speech therapy or performative 'talking cure' that counters the broken melancholic language ubiquitous in Hell, within which analysis of *acedia* in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* provides a case in point. Such a reading of Dante's *Commedia* is useful not only for the new light it sheds on Dante's poem and on the differences between *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, but also for the communication between the works of Dante, Petrarch, and Proust which it enables by a setting out of key terminology and points of comparison.

In the first instance my theoretical basis is Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' (*SE* XIV:237-58), which distinguishes between mourning as a normal detachment of oneself from the lost object in order to make space for a new, replacement love object, and melancholia as a pathological, impeded response to loss. I use Dante's *Commedia* to critique

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<sup>127</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: The Folio Society, 2013), p. 66.

Freud's model, and Freud's model to critique Dante's *Commedia*, in a symbiotic process of reading that stages a productive interpolation of medieval and modern concerns. I also draw on the anti-teleological, circular repetitions of the death drive to define the infernal situation, as derived from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (SE XVIII:7-64). My point of entry is a historical contextualisation of Dante's representations of the sin of *acedia*, as well as reflection on the relationship between medieval *acedia* and twentieth-century melancholia, particularly as interpreted by Julia Kristeva in *Soleil noir*.

Discussion of *acedia* in *Inferno* is a contentious topic, but provides a good avenue for exploring the major themes of the first *cantica* of the *Commedia* and leads to a new understanding of *Purgatorio* by way of contrast. I address, firstly, the background to *acedia* as a medieval sin and, secondly, critical problems inherent in speaking of *acedia* in Dante's *Inferno*, before, thirdly, presenting my argument for seeing *acedia* as part of a specific circle of Hell. At this point examples from throughout *Inferno* will be drawn on in order to define the infernal situation as, consistently, one of linguistic breakdown. Dante's *Inferno* can be read as a catalogue of different representations of melancholia, which in many instances anticipate features identified by later writers concerned with the melancholic disposition. The second half of this chapter characterises *Purgatorio* as a way out of infernal melancholia, achieved through a work of mourning coupled with recourse to performative liturgical language.

### *A brief background to acedia*

The key secondary text for understanding *acedia* is Siegfried Wenzel's *The Sin of Sloth*, which provides an excellent guide from the origins of *acedia* in the fourth century to its establishment in the accepted canon of sins up until the end of the Middle Ages. Wenzel

outlines three main stages of development in the understanding and classification of the sin: firstly, its emergence in the writings and experiences of Egyptian desert monks, most notably Evagrius Ponticus; secondly, its uptake in Western monasteries as promulgated by John Cassian early in the fifth century; and thirdly, if slowly, its diffusion, well-established by the thirteenth century, to lay people in society much more broadly, for instance via pastoral writings (such as sermons and confession manuals or *libri poenitentiales*) and literature (including Dante and Petrarch, but also William Langland's *Piers Plowman*). *Acedia* passes from being a technical term used to describe the isolated experience of an ascetic hermit to being an acknowledged threat for anyone fully immersed in religious life (i.e. monks living together in communities) and, finally, to having much wider implications in society at large, although still linked to devotional habits and activities. Part of this third stage, the popularisation of *acedia*, entails the expansion of the understanding of the sin to cover sloth, that is, physical laziness and slowness (originally in prayer and church attendance, but eventually not solely), rather than as a more spiritual or psychological phenomenon. In modern-day usage, sloth has become wholly detached from its links to spiritual life, following a gradual process of secularisation which can be seen to begin in the fourteenth century. Concomitant with the prevalence of the term 'sloth' and its secular connotations, the gradual disappearance of *acedia* is to be noted. In the past few centuries or so, discussion of *acedia* tends to relegate it to an obsolete, historical phenomenon. Interestingly, the fall of *acedia* coincides with the rise of discussion and diagnosis of melancholy from the seventeenth century onwards, as epitomised by Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, already cited in the Introduction. This apparent exchange may suggest a kinship between the two terms (Giorgio Agamben, for instance, posits melancholia as 'l'erede laica' of *acedia*),<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Stanze: La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), p. 18.

although a direct conflation of the medieval sin and the early-modern malady is, naturally, to be avoided.

Early writers associate a plethora of different symptoms with *acedia*. The diagnostic tools enumerated by Cassian, for instance, are as follows: ‘otiositas, somnolentia, inportunitas, inquietudo, pervagatio, instabilitas mentis et corporis, verbositas, curiositas’, ‘*laziness, sleepiness, rudeness, restlessness, roving about, instability of mind and body, talkativeness, and curiosity*’.<sup>129</sup> More succinctly, Cassian also considers *acedia* as ‘anxietas seu taedium cordis’,<sup>130</sup> ‘*anxiety or weariness of the heart*’.<sup>131</sup> Behind these various manifestations of *acedia*, the final, sinful result is consistently that of distraction from the divine, an inattentiveness in holy devotions, or a neglect of one’s spiritual duties. Cassian, writing with first-hand experience of ascetic life and of Evagrius’s teaching, particularly associates *acedia* with the isolated life led by desert monks in Egypt. As he discusses at length in book X of *The Institutes*, *acedia* causes intense dissatisfaction with one’s surroundings and one’s own company, and is sinful since it distracts monks from their true duties, namely silence, prayer, and contemplation of the divine.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, Cassian identifies *acedia* as the ‘noonday devil’ (‘daemonio meridiano’) of Psalm 90.6, as well as the sleepiness of Psalm 118.28,

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Agamben’s first chapter is dedicated to ‘Il demone meridiano’, pp. 5–14.

<sup>129</sup> John Cassian, ‘Fifth Conference: The Conference of Abba Serapion: On the Eight Principal Vices’, in *The Conferences*, trans. and annotated by Boniface Ramsey OP (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), pp. 177–209 (p. 198, X, XVI.5); Cassianus, ‘Conlatio Abbatis Sarapionis. De octo vitiis principalibus’, in *Collationes (XXIII)*, ed. by Michael Petschenig, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 13 (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), pp. 119–51 (pp. 142–3).

<sup>130</sup> Cassian, *Collationes*, p. 121 (V, I).

<sup>131</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, p. 183 (X, II).

<sup>132</sup> Cassian, ‘Tenth Book: The Spirit of Acedia’, in *The Institutes*, trans. and annotated by Boniface Ramsey OP (New York: The Newman Press, 2000), pp. 217–34. Cassianus, ‘Liber decimus: De spiritu acediae’, in *De institutis coenobiorum, de incarnatione contra Nestorium*, ed. by Michael Petschenig, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 17 (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), pp. 172–93.

which in the Greek of the Septuagint originally read ‘My soul has slumbered because of *acedia* [*ἀκηδία*]’.<sup>133</sup>

The next key stage in the history of *acedia* is its disappearance. In Gregory the Great’s influential scheme, the number of sins is reduced to seven from Cassian’s eight vices, *acedia* being excluded. We can surmise that this reduction might be for numerological reasons (the prevalence and propitious nature of the number seven), and that it is made possible by the closeness of *acedia* to *tristitia*. As Wenzel shows, the two share notable characteristics, such as bitterness, despair, inertia, and distraction.<sup>134</sup> Yet in the list of sins that was eventually to become canonical and fixed by the twelfth century, *acedia* takes the place of *tristitia*, further underlining the similarities between the two. At this point, after all, they seem fairly interchangeable, and definitions of *acedia* – such as that of Peter Lombard in his *Sentences* – often use *tristitia* as a synonym.<sup>135</sup>

It is also important, as we move towards consideration of *acedia* in Dante’s *Inferno*, to note that *acedia* and *tristitia* are strongly linked not only one to the other, but also to anger. This association follows on from Cassian’s understanding of the concatenation or interlinking of the vices: ‘prioris exuberantia sequenti efficiatur exordium. nam de abundantia gastrimargiae fornicationem, de fornicatione filargyriam, de filargyria iram, de ira tristitiam, de tristitia acediam necesse est pullulare’;<sup>136</sup> ‘the overflow of the previous [vice] serves as the start of the next one. For from an excess of gluttony, there inevitably springs fornication; from fornication, avarice; from avarice, anger; from anger, sadness; from sadness,

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<sup>133</sup> Cassian, *The Institutes*, p. 221 (X, iv): ‘In one verse blessed David beautifully expressed all the misfortunes of this disease, when he said: “My soul slept from weariness” – that is, from *acedia*’; ‘Huius aegritudinis uniuersa incommode uno uersiculo beatus David eleganter expressit dormitauit, inquiens, anima mea prae taedio, id est prae *acedia*’ (*De institutis*, p. 176).

<sup>134</sup> Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, p. 23.

<sup>135</sup> Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, trans. by Giulio Silano, 4 vols (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007–10), II: *On Creation* (2008), distinction 42, chapter 6 (p. 210). Petri Lombardi, *Libri sententiarum quatuor*, ed. by J.-P. Migne (Paris: [n. pub.], 1841), p. 243 (‘acediam vel tristitiam’).

<sup>136</sup> Cassian, *Collationes*, pp. 129–30.

*acedia*'.<sup>137</sup> Given the possible links between *acedia* and melancholy,<sup>138</sup> it is also notable that there is an etymological connection between melancholy and anger, as Jennifer Radden has suggested, deriving from the similarity between *cholē* (bile) and *cholos* (anger) in Greek.<sup>139</sup> In due course I use some of these connections between *acedia* and anger to explain the rationale behind the fifth circle of Dante's Hell.

First, though, I wish to stress the recognised effect of *acedia* on language, since this will be an important element in my argument for identifying Dantean infernal *acedia*. In a medieval Christian context, mumbling or skipping syllables or words of one's prayers, psalms, or Scriptural readings is considered to be a frequent symptom of *acedia*.<sup>140</sup> In Scholastic theology such an association of *acedia* with a broken or stuttering voice is confirmed. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas define *acedia* respectively as “tristitia vocem auferens”<sup>141</sup> (from ‘auferre’ meaning to carry away, steal, remove) and “tristitia vocem amputans”<sup>142</sup> (from ‘amputare’, to cut off, shorten), ‘sorrow depriving of speech’.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, the former suggests that there is even an etymological link between *acedia* and broken speech:

[Acedia] est tristitia aggravans; quia ex difficultate boni aggravatur et infirmatur ad bonum. In omnibus autem infirmitas aggravans acuit vocem, sicut patet in omnibus

<sup>137</sup> Cassian, *The Conferences*, p. 189.

<sup>138</sup> See Wenzel, ‘Appendix A: Acedia and the Humors’, in *The Sin of Sloth*, pp. 191–4, and Antonio del Castello, *Accidia e melanconia: Studio storico-fenomenologico su fonti cristiane dall’Antico Testamento a Tommaso d’Aquino* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010). Melancholy here derives from the Classical system of the four humours and is more precise than its modern meaning as a vague emotion or mood of sadness and nostalgia.

<sup>139</sup> Jennifer Radden, ‘Melancholy and Melancholia’, p. 238.

<sup>140</sup> Paul Alphandéry, ‘De quelques documents médiévaux relatifs à des états psychasthéniques’, *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, 26 (1929), 763–87 (p. 778).

<sup>141</sup> See Albert the Great, ‘Quaestio CXVIII: De acedia’, in *Summa theologiae*, pars secunda, tractatus XVIII, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. by Auguste Borgnet, 38 vols (Paris: Vivès, 1890–99), XXXIII (1895), pp. 369–73. Albert is quoting, so he informs the reader, from book II of St John of Damascus’s *De fide orthodoxa*.

<sup>142</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, II, p. 209 (pars I-II, quaest. 35, art. 8, arg. 3). This definition is, as Thomas tells us, ‘secundum Gregorium Nyssenum’. See also Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, pp. 53–4; Giovanni Pascoli, ‘Gli studi danteschi del Pascoli: Minerva oscura’, in *Opere*, ed. by Cesare Federico Goffis, 2 vols (Milan: Rizzoli, 1978), II, pp. 679–804 (p. 760); and, Tambling, *Dante in Purgatory*, p. 150.

<sup>143</sup> Thomas Aquinas, ‘ST’, VI, p. 421 (‘according to Gregory Nemesius’).

ægris: et ex tali aggravatione derivatur Latine nomen *acediæ*: quia *ἄχος* in Græco idem est quod vocem aggravans.<sup>144</sup>

*[Acedia] is an oppressing sadness ['aggravare' = to weigh down, worsen]; because this difficulty weighs down and enfeebles seeking the good. In all, this worsening weakness sharpens the voice, in the same way as all suffer from grief [ægris = pain, sickness, grief]: and from such oppression is derived the Latin noun acedia: which comes from the Greek ἄχος [akhos] which is oppressing the voice. [my translation]*

This link between *acedia* and broken or impeded speech is an important point of consonance with the characteristics of twentieth-century, Kristevan melancholia. In *Soleil noir*, Kristeva begins by tracing the history of melancholia from Aristotle's day up to the twentieth century (*SN*, pp. 16–18),<sup>145</sup> before providing her own contribution to the term, drawing on her clinical experience as well as on studies of art and literature. Even in pre-medieval thought, melancholy has been associated with stuttering, for instance in pseudo-Aristotelian and pseudo-Hippocratic works.<sup>146</sup> Kristeva, too, is keen to highlight the effects melancholia has on language. The Kristevan melancholic characteristically suffers from asymbolia, resulting in a 'discours déprimé, bâti de signes absurdes, de séquences ralenties, disloquées, arrêtées, [et qui] traduit l'effondrement du sens dans l'innommable où il [ou elle] s'abîme [...]' (*SN*, p. 63). For Kristeva, acceptance of loss through successful mourning, 'un deuil accompli' (*SN*, p. 52), allows the lost object to be refound and recuperated in language. When, however, mourning is unsuccessful, blocked and incomplete – in short, 'un deuil impossible' (*SN*, p. 55) – the result is melancholic broken speech. In mourning the object is

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<sup>144</sup> Albert the Great, 'Quæstio CXVIII: De acedia', *Summa theologiae*, p. 370. See Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, p. 54.

<sup>145</sup> Kristeva makes brief mention of Dante on the way, citing *Inferno* III and XIII as examples where sadness is a sin (*SN*, pp. 17–18). She does not mention *Inferno* VII, although she closes her discussion of Dante with a comment on *acedia*: 'Les moines du Moyen Âge cultiveront toutefois la tristesse : ascèse mystique (*acedia*), elle s'imposera comme moyen de connaissance paradoxale de la vérité divine et constituera l'épreuve majeure de la foi' (*SN*, p. 18). While I agree with Kristeva's second characterisation of *acedia* (as a test of faith), her linking of *acedia* and truth is not borne out by the medieval examples explored by Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*.

<sup>146</sup> As noted by Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 34.

lost in life, but found in language, through a form of sublimation.<sup>147</sup> In melancholia a failure to sublimate or name the loss suffered because of a denial of that loss leads to either inhibited language and ultimately aphasia, or to verbal hyperactivity and linguistic dissipation. In either case, the loss of the loved object (the signified) disrupts language (the signifier), which is thereby stripped of its meaningfulness and referentiality and left spiralling into a void:

Dans l'impossibilité d'enchaîner, la phrase s'interrompt, s'épuise, s'arrête. Les syntagmes mêmes ne parviennent pas à se formuler. Un rythme répétitif, une mélodie monotone, viennent dominer les séquences logiques brisées et les transformer en litanies récurrentes, obsédantes. Enfin, lorsque cette musicalité frugale s'épuise à son tour, ou simplement ne réussit pas à s'installer à force de silence, le mélancolique semble suspendre avec la profération toute idéation, sombrant dans le blanc de l'asymbolie ou dans le trop-plein d'un chaos idéatoire inordonnable. (SN, p. 45)<sup>148</sup>

I will show that such a breakdown of language, symptomatic of melancholia, is typical not only of the infernal *accidiosi*, but of *Inferno* in general.

### *Dante's place in and contribution to the history of acedia*

Within this brief history of the term, Dante is to be situated between the second and third stages, that is, at a point when *acedia* is still seen to be a dangerous corollary of monastic life, but is also a worry for the religious life of all those living in the world. Evidence of this can be drawn from *Purgatorio*, where *acedia* has an explicit, fixed place. As regards the precise meaning of the term for Dante, readers can get some sense of this from the synonyms with which the author glosses the sin. In Dante, *acedia* is explicitly to be found in *Purgatorio* XVIII, where it is explicitly identified as such ('accidia', v. 132), and glossed as 'negligenza e

<sup>147</sup> The notion of sublimation is explored in Chapter Two and in the Epilogue, although I note here that Kristeva's version is Freudian in its emphasis on transformation.

<sup>148</sup> I should note at this point that this is only half the story, the dark side, of *Soleil noir*. As I show in relation to Petrarch in Chapter Two, for Kristeva melancholia has a sunny side; it can be a creative and beautiful force when channelled into art. My analysis of infernal language as melancholic necessarily ignores this more positive aspect of Kristevan melancholia.

indugio', and 'tepidezza in ben far' (vv. 107, 108). Statius later confirms the identification of *acedia* with 'tepidezza' (*Purg.*XXII.92). In *Purgatorio* XVII, Virgil explains that in the grand scheme of the middle realm, all sin stems from one of three kinds of wrong love, whether misdirected love (pride, envy, anger), insufficient love (*acedia*), or excessive love (avarice, gluttony, lust). In the words of the original explanation, love ““puote errar per malo obietto, | o per troppo o per poco di vigore”” (*Purg.*XVII.95–6). Again, *acedia* is considered a lack of desire, resulting in a lack of vigour: it is 'lento amore' (*Purg.*XVII.130). As Virgil states, ““L'amor del bene, scemo | del suo dover, quiritta si ristora; | qui si ribatte il mal tardato remo”” (*Purg.*XVII.85–7).

Here I note that Thomas Aquinas's definition of *acedia* as 'tristitia [...] de bono divino',<sup>149</sup> 'sorrow about spiritual good',<sup>150</sup> is close to Dante's definition of the sin in *Purgatorio*. That is, *acedia* is seen by both to be a slowness and sadness in one's spiritual duties that results from a lack of desire and causes spiritual negligence, inattention during prayers, reluctance to go to church, and so forth. It is a sin as it is a negation of *caritas* and of the *gaudium* that should ensue from divine service. The association between *acedia* and monasticism is continued in *Purgatorio* with the presence of the abbot of San Zeno as the principal sinner on the terrace of sloth; *acedia* is, at its origin, as we have seen, a problem of religious tepidity affecting monks primarily. I shall return to the fourth terrace of *Purgatorio* in order to situate Dante's designated cure for *acedia* within its historical context once more, as well as within the economy of the *Commedia* as a whole, but turn first to *Infèrno* in order to identify where those damned for their *acedia* can be found, if anywhere.

It is immediately tempting to identify *acedia* with the lukewarm or neutrals found within the gates of Hell but before the boundary marked by the river Acheron, since these

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<sup>149</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, pars II-II, qu.35, art.2 (III, pp. 224–5).

<sup>150</sup> 'ST', IX, p. 463.

souls, condemned for their apathy in life, are forced to run endlessly in what is a superficial parallel with the *accidiosi* in Purgatory.<sup>151</sup> However, their exclusion from Hell proper must preclude their being tarred with the brush of a serious and categorically theological sin. Moreover, while both the *ignavi* and the *accidiosi* are united by a lack of passion ('poco [...] vigore' or 'lento amore', in the terms from *Purgatorio* XVII quoted above), in the case of the latter this is specifically a lack of love for God, whereas in the case of the former, this is a lack of any emotional engagement whatsoever, whether concerning a failure in religious devotion (the possible reference, *Inf.*III.60, to the abdication of Pope Celestine V) or a lack of political integrity more generally.

Having discounted the souls in *Inferno* III as *accidiosi*, I turn to the fifth circle of Hell, to the passage in which Dante uses the precise adjective 'accidioso'. At this point Virgil and Dante-pilgrim have passed first through Limbo, and then through the three circles of lust, gluttony, and avarice and prodigality. Following the purgatorial model of the seven deadly sins, the presence of anger and *acedia* following on from these vices would seem logical, as if mirroring in reverse order the terraces of the mountain (descending from lust to gluttony to avarice and prodigality to *acedia* to anger). However, it must be recognised that *Inferno* does not follow the same model as *Purgatorio* (that of wrong love set right in a supremely Christian context). Instead, as Virgil reveals to the pilgrim in *Inferno* XI, Hell is based on a tripartite Aristotelian model from 'incontinenza' (circles two to five) and violence (against oneself, against others, and against God, punished in the seventh circle) to fraud or 'malizia' (in the eight and ninth circles).<sup>152</sup> Still, the presence of categories of sin in

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<sup>151</sup> See *Inf.*III.31-69, and the brief entry for the 'ignavi' in *ED*, III, p. 357. Various commentators gloss this passage as *accidia*. See, for instance, Cristoforo Landino, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, ed. by Paolo Procaccioli, 4 vols (Rome: Salerno, 2001), I, p. 391 ('pigra accidia').

<sup>152</sup> The complexity of the structure of Hell is evident even from this brief summary, which does not account for circle six (the heretics, *Inferno* X), and is even in the explanatory passage of *Inferno* XI difficult to follow, since

upper Hell that correspond with capital sins purged in *Purgatorio* is striking, even if such a parallel begs at least the question of why anger and *acedia* would be in the same circle, rather than contiguous circles.

Within this scheme, the passage in question, Virgil's description to Dante-pilgrim of the particular group of souls who are punished by being submerged at the bottom of the gloomy river Styx, is taken from the fifth circle of Hell:

Lo buon maestro disse: 'Figlio, or vedi  
l'anime di color cui vinse l'ira;  
e anche vo' che tu per certo credi  
che sotto l'acqua è gente che sospira,  
e fanno pullular quest'acqua al summo,  
come l'occhio ti dice, u' che s'aggira.  
Fitti nel limo dicon: "Tristi fummo  
ne l'aere dolce che dal sol s'allegra,  
portando dentro accidioso fummo:  
or ci attristiam ne la belletta negra".  
Quest'inno si gorgoglian ne la strozza,  
ché dir nol posson con parola integra'. (*Inf.*VII.115-26)

These lines have attracted a huge amount of critical attention, mainly centred on the question of what these souls have to do with the sin of anger which introduces this passage, and whose representative sinner Filippo Argenti appears in the following *canto*.

I believe that these souls form an important, separate group of souls within the circle of Hell globally ascribed to the angry. More specifically, these lines seem to me to present several key indications that these souls are to be identified as suffering from *acedia*,<sup>153</sup> so that this circle might more properly be described as the circle of anger and *acedia*. The first indicator is, of course, Dante's use of the adjective 'accidioso', a *hapax legomenon* in the

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Virgil's division into 'le tre disposizion che 'l ciel non vole, | incontenenza, malizia e la matta | bestialitate' (vv. 81-3) is presumably not in sequential order (if we accept 'malizia' as fraud and 'bestialitate' as violence).

<sup>153</sup> For support in identifying these souls as *accidiosi*, see: *L'Ottimo commento della 'Divina Commedia': Testo inedito d'un contemporaneo di Dante citato dagli Accademici della Crusca*, ed. by Alessandro Torri, 3 vols (Pisa: Presso Niccolò Capurro, 1827-29), I, p. 130; Francesco D'Ovidio, *Studii sulla 'Divina Commedia'* (Milan and Palermo: Remo Sandron, 1901), p. 245; Benedetto Croce, *La poesia di Dante*, 2nd edn (Bari: Laterza & figli, 1921), p. 80.

*Commedia*, and a term which Dante surely chose deliberately and with its specific meaning (as elaborated on the terrace of *acedia* in *Purgatorio*) clearly in mind.<sup>154</sup>

Yet unable to reconcile the presence of *acedia* in the circle of anger, and its briefest of mentions, many critics have offered different, plausible interpretations. The most common explanation is that the submerged souls did commit the sin of anger, but that their anger took a particular form, that of bitter or repressed anger, following an Aristotelian division of the angry into various distinct forms.<sup>155</sup> Another suggestion is that the submerged souls suffered from a lack of anger, while those on the surface suffered from an excess of anger.<sup>156</sup> A further suggestion is that the whole circle is not to be identified with anger at all, but rather with *tristitia*, itself thought, albeit spuriously, by medieval etymologists to be inscribed in the name Styx. This is the view of Vittorio Russo,<sup>157</sup> which Robert Durling approves,<sup>158</sup> and this would place the sinners not too far from *acedia*, itself often considered close to or even synonymous with *tristitia* as noted earlier. Yet insisting that the souls are specifically *accidiosi*, in the face of such evidence, the question arises as to whether there is a precedent for coupling the seemingly unconnected sins of *ira* and *acedia*.

On the one hand, it is tempting to see *acedia* as perhaps the opposite of *ira*, following the logic that sees the avaricious and the prodigals punished together in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* and stemming from the Aristotelian dictum, summarised by Dante in the *Convivio*, that ‘ciascuna di queste vertudi ha due inimici collaterali, cioè vizii, uno in troppo

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<sup>154</sup> See Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, pp. 200–2, although Wenzel remains in the end ambivalent and undecided about whether these souls are to be identified as *accidiosi*.

<sup>155</sup> See Francesco Flamini, *I significati reconditi della Commedia di Dante*, 2 vols (Livorno: Raffaello Giusti, 1903–4), I, pp. 161–75. According to this interpretation, the *accidiosi* are in fact ‘amari’, suffering from ‘ira repressa’. See also Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896–1917), II (1899), pp. 173–8.

<sup>156</sup> Steno Vazzana, *Il contrappasso nella ‘Divina Commedia’* (Rome: Editrice M. Ciranna, [1960]), pp. 58–9.

<sup>157</sup> Vittorio Russo, *Sussidi di esegesi dantesca* (Naples: Liguori, 1966), pp. 71–128.

<sup>158</sup> *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Volume I: Inferno*, ed. and trans. by Robert Durling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 125.

e un altro in poco; e queste tutte sono li mezzi intra quelli'.<sup>159</sup> This is the line that Boccaccio takes, describing 'accidia' as the 'vizio opposito all'iracundia'.<sup>160</sup> Yet, as Gino Casagrande reminds us, strictly speaking 'l'ira è l'unica delle undici passioni dell'animo che non abbia contrario',<sup>161</sup> and indeed Dante's positing of 'Mansuetudine' as the corresponding virtuous mean of 'ira' seems to exclude *acedia* from this scheme.<sup>162</sup>

On the other hand, however, it seems that an association between *ira* and *acedia* is traditional; as I have already discussed, the two sins were considered to be interlinked in Cassian's scheme, via *tristitia*. Moreover, this connection is confirmed by other medieval writers. Anger is specifically connected to sadness by Thomas Aquinas, who writes, following Aristotle, 'ira est semper cum tristitia, quia, ut dicitur in VII Ethic., *omnis qui facit aliquid per iram, facit tristatus*';<sup>163</sup> 'anger is never without sorrow, since, as stated in Ethic. vii. 6, everyone that acts from anger, acts with pain'.<sup>164</sup> Bonaventure also notes that 'Ira, cum non potest se vindicare, tristatur, et ideo ex ea nascitur accidia',<sup>165</sup> 'Anger, when it cannot be satisfied, causes sadness, and from this is born acedia' (my translation). Similarly, in a vernacular context, Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto* asserts 'In ira nasce e posa | Acedia nighittosa',<sup>166</sup> while subsequently Boccaccio will define anger as 'un movimento subito e

<sup>159</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. by Franca Brambilla Ageno, 2 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995), II, pp. 373–4 (trattato quarto, XVII, 7).

<sup>160</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la 'Commedia' di Dante*, ed. by Giorgio Padoan, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. by Vittore Branca, 10 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1964–98), VI (1965), p. 441.

<sup>161</sup> "Accidioso fummo" (*Inf.*VII.123), *Studi danteschi*, 67 (2002), 57–71 (p. 58).

<sup>162</sup> *Convivio*, II, p. 372 (trattato quarto, XVII, 5).

<sup>163</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, pars I-II, quæst. 48, art. 1, arg. 1.

<sup>164</sup> 'ST', VI, p. 531.

<sup>165</sup> From the *Compendium theologicæ veritatis* III vii, cited in *ED*, I, p. 26 (on 'accidia e accidiosi'), and also by Salvatore Floro di Zenzo, *Da Sofia a Beatrice: Presupposti culturali e fonti teologiche nella 'Divina Commedia'* (Naples: Laurenziana, 1984), p. 360. Di Zenzo, although he recognises the juxtaposition of anger and *acedia* in *Inferno*, both considers the latter as the antithesis of the former and concludes that they belong 'in due campi diversi' (p. 362), not in the same circle.

<sup>166</sup> Brunetto Latini, *Tesoretto*, ed. by Marcello Ciccuto (Milan: Rizzoli, 1985), vv. 2683–4. Cited by Michele Scherillo, *Alcuni capitoli della biografia di Dante* (Turin: Ermanno Loescher, 1896), p. 410.

inconsiderato, da sentita tristitia sospinto'.<sup>167</sup> These quotations support my contention that the souls at the end of *Inferno* VII do suffer from *acedia*, and that the juxtaposition of *acedia* and anger in the same circle does have a certain, persuasive logic to it. The closeness of *tristitia* (itself seen as synonymous with *acedia*) to *ira* may also become clearer if it is remembered that in medieval times, the word 'ira', coming from Occitan, had a range of meanings not restricted to 'anger' alone, but rather in addition including 'tristesse' and 'chagrin'.<sup>168</sup> It is in this sense that 'duol' or 'dolore' and 'ira' are often paired.<sup>169</sup>

From the passage at the end of *Inferno* VII we can summarise that the three main characteristics of the sin in question, and its punishment, are sadness, an inability to speak, and darkness. For these souls, there has been no change from life to death; there is no difference between the past, 'Tristi fummo', and the endless present continuous of 'or ci attristiam'. Strikingly, these three features – misery, aphasia, and obscurity – are defining traits not only of *acedia*, but also of 'l'ensemble mélancolico-dépressif' which Kristeva discusses in *Soleil noir*. As I highlighted earlier, Kristeva argues that melancholia reveals itself in distorted and impeded speech, a symptom surprisingly analogous to this group of sinners' forfeiting of any 'parola integra' (*Inf*.VII.126). Their speech is not audible, but rather visible from the bubbles on the surface of the water (*Inf*.VII.119–20), in an infernal parody of God's 'visibile parlare' on the Terrace of Pride in *Purgatorio* (*Purg*.X.95). Moreover, the submersion of the souls in the Styx suggests that they are literally *depressed*, 'pressed down; put or kept down by pressure or force', as the *OED*'s first definition of the word has it. In this, the *accidiosi* are once more aligned with melancholics. As Jean Starobinski has

<sup>167</sup> Boccaccio, *Decameron*, in *Tutte le opere*, IV (1976), p. 378 (giornata IV, novella 3).

<sup>168</sup> *Petit dictionnaire provençal-français*, ed. by Emil Levy (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1973), p. 215.

<sup>169</sup> For instance, in the line 'parole di dolore, accenti di ira', *Inf*.III.26. See, however, also *Aeneid*, book 1, lines 25–6, '(necdum etiam causae irarum saevique dolores | exciderant animo [...])', 'not yet too, had the cause of her wrath and her bitter sorrows faded from her mind'. Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid 1–6*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. by G.P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 264/5.

commented, ‘La lenteur, la pesanteur font partie des attributs les plus constants du personnage mélancolique, quand il n’est pas voué à l’immobilité complète.’<sup>170</sup> Dante’s infernal *accidiosi* might, then, be a literalisation of Freud’s description of ‘the crushed state of melancholia’ (*SE* XIV:248).

Moreover, the word ‘inno’ in this passage evokes, ironically, the hymns sung as the penitent souls progress up the mountain (such as ‘l’inno intero’ of *Purg.*VIII.17). In *Inferno* we thus find a parody of the earthly liturgy which is so efficacious in *Purgatorio*. It is interesting to compare this infernal hymn to Augustine of Hippo’s definition of the essential characteristics of a hymn (from his commentary on Psalm 148.14):

Hymnus scitis quid est? Cantus est cum laude dei. Si laudas deum, et non cantas, non dicis hymnum. Si cantas, et non laudas deum, non dicis hymnum. Si laudas aliud quod non pertinet ad laudem dei, etsi cantando laudes, non dicis hymnum. Hymnus ergo tria ista habet, et cantum et laudem et dei.<sup>171</sup>

*Do you know what a hymn is? It is a song in praise of God. If you praise God without singing, you are not offering a hymn. If you sing but do not praise God, that is not a hymn either. If you praise something else, something unconnected with the praise of God, then, even though you are singing praise, you are not singing a hymn. A hymn implies three things: it must be sung, it must consist of praise, and the praise must be offered to God. The praise of God, when sung, is called a hymn.*<sup>172</sup>

The ‘inno’ of *Inferno* VII seems to be a deliberate subversion of this tripartite definition, as it is neither sung, nor is it in a praising vein or directed towards God; it is, instead, a wholly self-absorbed, self-pitying, complaining lament that is mumbled incomprehensibly.

The reference to the choked, incomprehensible, bumbled hymn in relation to the infernal *accidiosi*, moreover, suggests the way in which these souls must have sinned while

<sup>170</sup> Jean Starobinski, *La Mélancolie au miroir: trois lectures de Baudelaire* (Paris: Julliard, 1989), p. 19.

<sup>171</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Enarrationes in Psalmos (141-150)*, ed. by Franco Gori and Iuliana Spaccia, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 95/5 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2005), p. 267.

<sup>172</sup> Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, trans. by Maria Boulding OSB, ed. by John E. Rotelle, 6 vols, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century*, 20:3 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000-04), VI (Psalms 121-50), p. 490.

on Earth, according to the law of the Dantean *contrapasso* that is both a punishment for and a manifestation of the sin committed in life.<sup>173</sup> Given that the punishment of the infernal *accidiosi* is a clear continuation of their sin on Earth, the inadequate expression of religious language to which these souls are condemned in *Inferno* parallels the well-known earthly symptoms of *acedia* such as mumbling when reciting in church discussed above. There is even a story, taken from Jacques de Vitry's collection of moral *exempla* suitable for sermons (*circa* early thirteenth century), of a holy man in church who sees a devil collecting in a sack words and syllables which have been skipped or rushed too much by the clergy during the recitation of the psalms, with the implication that the weight and fullness of the sack will later be used as evidence to damn the lazy speaker.<sup>174</sup> This story is then cited as an example of *acedia* specifically in *Jacob's Well*.<sup>175</sup> It resonates with the suggestion implicit in the passage from *Inferno* VII that these sinners are in Hell because of the sin of *acedia* which they perhaps manifested in life by a lack of clarity, due reverence, or completion in their speaking and singing in church. With such evidence, and drawing on the Scholastic definitions of *acedia* as sadness cutting off the voice cited earlier, I conclude that the group of submerged souls in *Inferno* VII must undoubtedly be identified as *accidiosi*, and that the labelling of this circle should be extended to include the *accidiosi* alongside the angry.

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<sup>173</sup> On such an interpretation of 'inno' in *Inferno* VII, see Erminia Ardissino, *Tempo liturgico e tempo storico nella 'Commedia' di Dante* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), p. 34.

<sup>174</sup> *Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the 'Sermones vulgares'*, ed. by Thomas Frederick Crane (London: The Folk-Lore Society, 1890), p. 6 (and gloss, p. 141).

<sup>175</sup> See *Jacob's Well, an Englisht Treatise on the Cleansing of Man's Conscience*, ed. by Arthur Brandeis (London: Early English Text Society, 1900), pp. 114–15, and Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, p. 113.

## *Melancholia and melancholic language in Inferno*

‘What is hell? Hell is oneself,  
Hell is alone, the other figures in it  
Merely projections. There is nothing to escape from  
And nothing to escape to. One is always alone.’<sup>176</sup>

In the light of *Inferno* more generally, it seems that the *accidiosi* in *Inferno* VII encapsulate in a concentrated form the melancholic features of sadness, darkness, immobility, and disrupted speech that are characteristic of the infernal realm. Indeed, the damned souls are at one point collectively referred to as ‘i sommersi’ (*Inf.XX.3*), a description which inevitably reminds the reader of the literal state of the *accidiosi*, submerged under the Styx, while Hell is retrospectively described generically as “i luoghi tristi” (*Purg.VIII.58*), picking up on the adjective which appears in the passage from the end of *Inferno* VII. I illustrate first the prevalence of broken speech in *Inferno*, before placing the endless repetition, circularity, and lack of hope of the damned souls against the Freudian death drive.

In general terms, describing *Inferno* as a melancholic space seems hardly surprising, as the example of the inscription above the infernal entrance, to cite but one instance, illustrates well. As Dante-pilgrim enters Hell he is confronted by ominous writing transcribed at the start of *Inferno* III and in which this realm is described as a “città dolente” steeped in “eterno dolore” and populated by “la perduta gente”. The climax to the message is the forbidding line “Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch’intrate” (*Inf.III.1-9*). Hell is thereby introduced as a place of endless pain, irreversible loss, and boundless despair.

Echoes of these lines resound throughout the first *cantica*. Virgil has already spoken of the infernal realm to Dante-pilgrim as a “loco eterno; | ove udirai le disperate strida, | vedrai li antichi spiriti dolenti” (*Inf.I.114-16*). The theme of despair is one that recurs: in

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<sup>176</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘The Cocktail Party’, in *Collected Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), pp. 123-214 (p. 169).

the introduction to the *ignavi*, whom even Hell refuses to receive, and who, in Virgil's words "non hanno speranza di morte" (*Inf.*III.46); in Charon's aggressive address to the souls on the banks of the Acheron, in which he exclaims "Non isperate mai veder lo cielo" (*Inf.*III.85); in the introduction to the lustful, of whom it is noted that 'nulla speranza li conforta mai' (*Inf.*V.44). Most famously, Virgil speaks of his own home in Hell, Limbo, as a place where "sanza speme vivemo in disio" (*Inf.*IV.42).<sup>177</sup> Hell is also consistently and unsurprisingly described as a place of suffering and darkness; it is 'la valle d'abisso dolorosa', '[o]scura e profonda' (*Inf.*IV.8 and 10), surrounded by 'l'aura nera' (*Inf.*V.51) or 'l'aere tenebroso' (*Inf.*VI.11). This darkness is a sign of the distance from and absence of God, who is consistently figured as a guiding sun in *Purgatorio* (the souls cannot progress up the mountain during 'la notturna tenebra', but only during daylight, as Sordello informs Virgil and Dante-pilgrim, *Purg.*VII.52-60), and as ineffable luminosity in *Paradiso* (e.g. 'luce divina', *Par.*XXXI.22).

Moreover, loss is the defining characteristic of those consigned to Hell, as suggested by the entrance inscription. Virgil's words soon after reinforce this point; the damned are "le genti dolorose | c'hanno perduto il ben de l'intelletto" (*Inf.*III.17-18). Freud analyses melancholia as a result of an unconscious and nameless loss, unlike the conscious loss that is the occasion of mourning: 'one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost, and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either' (*SE* XIV:245). Likewise, Dante's damned souls by definition do not know and cannot name what they have lost, for to know God truly would have been to be saved. Thus, in *Inferno* the name of God, 'Dio', appears in narrative (e.g. *Inf.*III.63 and 103), in the reported speech of Beatrice and Lucia (*Inf.*II.91 and 103) and in the words of Dante-pilgrim and his

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<sup>177</sup> On Limbo, see Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves*, pp. 33-49.

guide (*Inf*.I.131, *Inf*.III.122, *Inf*.IV.38), but not in the mouths of the sinners (except Vanni Fucci, *Inf*.XXV.3, who is as a consequence deemed the most ‘superbo’ of those in Hell). Part of the souls’ suffering, their *poena damni* is, however unconsciously, a result of the irrevocable loss of God and the punitively and psychologically painful result of their damnation, regardless of whatever physical suffering (*poena sensus*) also ensues from being in Hell.

The taboo on the name of God is one example of the pressure that melancholia exerts on the language used by the damned souls. More generally, Kristeva’s definition of melancholic language as broken, repetitive, and disjointed, bordering on the absurd and the meaningless, is a particularly apt description of patterns of speech in Dante’s *Inferno*. I note also that for Freud, melancholia is characterised by ‘insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure’ (*SE* XIV:247), a description highly relevant for many of the verbose souls in *Inferno*, and that his description of melancholia as ‘like an open wound’ (*SE* XIV:253) is particularly appropriate for understanding the speech of damned souls such as Pier della Vigna. As Elena Lombardi writes, in *Inferno* ‘speech becomes a tyrannical need, an open wound through which a narrative of hopeless desire is painfully uttered.’<sup>178</sup> Speech for the damned souls is impossible and necessary. It is painful, inescapable, repetitive, and, ultimately, pointless, a very different model of speech from the productive, improving, therapeutic one we find in *Purgatorio*.

The soundscape of Hell is rendered in general terms as Dante-pilgrim and Virgil enter the gates of Hell and are greeted by cacophonous noise:

Quivi sospiri, pianti e alti guai  
risonavan per l’aere senza stelle,  
per ch’io al cominciar ne lagrimai.

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<sup>178</sup> *The Syntax of Desire*, p. 164.

Diverse lingue, orribili favelle,  
 parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,  
 voci alte e fioche, e suon di man can elle.      (*Inf.*III.22-7)

I note the chaos of the list, and the degeneration of language into the purely physical, as meaningless sound descends into the beating of hands.<sup>179</sup> The sonorous opacity of speech is also portrayed in its most extreme, nonsensical form in the lines delivered later in *Inferno* by Pluto (“*Pape Satàn, pape Satàn aleppe!*”, *Inf.*VII.1)<sup>180</sup> and Nimrod (“*Raphèl mai amècche zabì almi!*”, *Inf.*XXXI.67).<sup>181</sup>

A similar catalogue of infernal sounds is to be found in *Inferno* V, where the narrator notes once more ‘quivi le strida, il compianto, il lamento’ (*Inf.*V.35). In this same *canto*, the sinner Francesca describes herself as speaking through tears, in a combination which is true for many of the damned souls, as for Petrarch, as we shall see in Chapter Two. Francesca announces to Dante-pilgrim, “*dirò come colui che piange e dice*” (*Inf.*V.126), and while her narrative indubitably augments her psychological suffering, for other damned souls in lower circles of Hell speech is not only emotionally but also physically painful. This is famously the case for Pier della Vigna, whose words are released by breaking off one of his branches, and are accompanied by bleeding: ‘de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme | parole e sangue’ (*Inf.*XIII.43-4). As Dante-narrator subsequently explains, ‘l’Arpie, pascendo poi de le sue foglie, | fanno dolore, e al dolor fenestra’ (*Inf.*XIII.101-2), with the alliterative chiasmus of the latter line highlighting the complicity between pain and its expression.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>179</sup> On this passage, see also Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire*, p. 146, and ‘Plurilingualism *sub specie aeternitatis* and the Strategies of a Minority Author’, in *Dante’s Plurilingualism*, pp. 133-47.

<sup>180</sup> See Mari Aversano, “PAPE SATAN, PAPE SATAN, ALEPPE!”, in *Filologia e critica dantesca: Studi offerti a Aldo Vallone* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1989), pp. 33-59.

<sup>181</sup> On Babel and Nimrod, see Bettina Lindorfer, ‘Language as a Mirror of the Soul: Guilt and Punishment in Dante’s Concept of Language’, in *Dante’s Plurilingualism*, pp. 122-32, and Errore Caccia’s entry on this line (‘Raphèl [...]’) in *ED*, IV, pp. 851-3.

<sup>182</sup> See Leo Spitzer, ‘Speech and Language in *Inferno* XIII’, in *Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by John Freccero (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 78-101.

Further physical impediments to speech as part of the infernal punishment are found in the *canti* of the thieves and of the schismatics. In *Inferno* XXV, the transformation of man into snake and snake into man results, for the first, in loss of speech ('suffolando si fugge', *Inf*.XXV.137), and for the second, in great difficulty in recovering the power of speech ('parlando sputa', *Inf*.XXV.138). Nostalgia is expressed in the first of these transformations for speech which is considered naturally and originally free and easy, in contrast to the forked and inarticulate tongue of the snake, as emphasised via plosive alliteration and 'a' assonance in the lines 'la lingua, ch'avèa unita e presta | prima a parlar, si fende' (*Inf*.XXV.133-4, my emphases). In the *canto* of the schismatics, later on, speech is once more impeded by physical distortion in the figure of Gaius Curio, whose tongue is cloven in contrast to his earlier verbosity: 'Oh quanto mi pareva sbigottito | con la lingua tagliata ne la strozza | Curio, ch'a dir fu così ardito!' (*Inf*.XXVIII.100-2).

Those who committed "consiglio frodolente" (*Inf*.XXVII.116), that is, misused language to deceive or lead astray, appropriately find their speech impeded by the fire that surrounds them. Of these sinners, both Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro have difficulty beginning to speak; their speech is preceded by a delay and a desperate flickering of their encapsulating flames. In this they join ranks with Kristeva's melancholics for whom 'le débit de l'énonciation est lent, les silences sont longs et fréquents, les rythmes ralentissent, les intonations se font monotones' (*SN*, p. 46). In the case of Ulysses:

Lo maggior corno de la fiamma antica  
cominciò a crollarsi mormorando,  
pur come quella cui vento affatica;  
indi la cima qua e là menando,  
come fosse la lingua che parlasse,  
gittò voce di fuori e disse: [...]. (*Inf*.XXVI.85-90)

Guido da Montefeltro is, similarly, only able at first to produce ‘un confuso suon’ (*Inf.*XXVII.6) which is rendered by the roaring and hissing of flames rather than any sound more articulate: ‘per non aver via né forame | dal principio nel foco, in suo linguaggio | si convertian le parole grame’ (*Inf.*XXVII.13–15).

Finally, however, it is Ugolino’s voice which is most memorably connected with suffering:<sup>183</sup>

Poi cominciò: ‘Tu vuo’ ch’io rinovelli  
 disperato dolor che ’l cor mi preme  
 già pur pensando, pria ch’io ne favelli.  
 Ma se le mie parole esser dien seme  
 che frutti infamia al traditor ch’i’ rodo,  
 parlare e lagrimar vedrai insieme.’ (*Inf.*XXXIII.4–9)

Here, speech is deemed to renew (*rinovellare*) grief, rather than assuage or relieve suffering.<sup>184</sup> This lack of change is highlighted by Ugolino’s situation before and after his speech, which is identical in its shocking bestiality. As Dante-poet narrates, ‘Quand’ ebbe detto ciò, con li occhi torti | *riprese* ’l teschio misero co’ denti’ (*Inf.*XXXIII.76–7, my emphasis). Ugolino resumes his earlier stance, unchanged by his own exercise of language and forever irredeemable. Ugolino also seems to be interpretable as a melancholic figure through his failure to mourn the death of his sons either in anticipation (he remains silent and tearless in the face of their suffering) or after their death.

The pointless repetitiousness of language in *Inferno* mirrors the pointlessness of repetition in the first *cantica* more generally. Moreover, this repetition can be seen, from a modern, psychoanalytical perspective, as suggestive of a form of the death drive haunting

<sup>183</sup> See Donna L. Yowell, ‘Ugolino’s “bestial segno”: The *De vulgari eloquentia* in *Inferno* XXXII–XXXIII’, *Dante Studies*, 104 (1986), 121–43; Piero Boitani, *The Tragic and the Sublime in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 20–55.

<sup>184</sup> Lombardi (*The Wings of the Doves*, pp. 177–83) reads these lines in conjunction with *Inf.*V.121–6 and also Virgil’s *Aeneid*, book 2, line 3, where Ugolino’s ‘rinovellare’ has a direct parallel with the opening line of Aeneas’s story, “‘Infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem’”, “‘Too deep for words, O queen, is the grief you bid me renew’”. Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid 1–6*, pp. 316/17.

Hell. Freud formulates his theory of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and its success since has mainly been in the field of literary studies, where it has been particularly welcomed as a useful way of talking about, for instance, the rhythm and construction of texts.<sup>185</sup> In essence, Freud discerns the existence of the death drive by observing that many activities do not serve the pleasure principle (the avoidance of ‘unpleasure’, and the pursuit of the pleasurable), and that painful repetitive situations are frequent. He gives such disparate examples as the repeated post-trauma nightmares experienced by soldiers returning from war (*SE* XVIII:12-13) and the fact that, in the game of *fort/da* described in the Introduction, ‘the first act, that of departure [*fort*, the mother’s absence], was staged as a game in itself and far more frequently than the episode in its entirety, with its pleasurable ending [*da*, the mother’s return]’ (*SE* XVIII:16). In order to account for such phenomena, Freud speculates that there must be an inner force at work opposing the pleasure principle, which he names the death drive. This drive is considered to be resistant to change, ‘*conservative*’, and even life-negating, in that it seeks to ‘*restore an earlier state of things*’ (*SE* XVIII:36, emphases in the original).<sup>186</sup> Freud himself associates melancholia, in *The Ego and the Id*, with ‘a pure culture of the death instinct’ (*SE* XIX:53), and certainly melancholia would appear to thrive upon the endless repetitions and inescapable circularity of the death drive. I argue that these two psychoanalytical concepts are useful ways of characterising *Inferno*, not only – as I have already demonstrated – in terms of melancholic language, but also as regards the temporality of the first *cantica*, which is marked by a similar, anti-teleological, repetitive circularity.

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<sup>185</sup> See, for instance, Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 90-112.

<sup>186</sup> See the entry for ‘pulsion de mort’ in Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, ed. by Daniel Lagache, 3rd edn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), pp. 371-8, and Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 84-106.

Kristeva's *Soleil noir* is once more useful, this time for its designation of a 'temporalité décentrée' within which the melancholic is trapped, and which resonates with the closed, backwards-facing temporality of the death drive:

Elle [la temporalité] ne s'écoule pas, le vecteur avant/après ne la gouverne pas, ne la dirige pas d'un passé vers un but. Massif, pesant, sans doute traumatique parce que chargé de trop de peine ou de trop de joie, *un moment* bouche l'horizon de la temporalité dépressive, ou plutôt lui enlève tout horizon, toute perspective. Fixé au passé, régressant au paradis ou à l'enfer d'une expérience indépassable, le mélancolique est une mémoire étrange : tout est révolu, semble-t-il dire, mais je suis fidèle à ce révolu, j'y suis cloué, il n'y a pas de révolution possible, pas d'avenir... Un passé hypertrophié, hyperbolique, occupe toutes les dimensions de la continuité psychique. (SN, p. 71)

This obsession with a past moment that blocks out any possible future is, unwittingly, an excellent description of memory in *Inferno* which constantly revolves around the sinful event of a precise point of time in the past and condemns the damned souls to repeat this event in thought, word, and action eternally. In the famous words of Francesca, "Nessun maggior dolore | che ricordarsi del tempo felice | ne la miseria" (*Inf.V.121-3*).<sup>187</sup> Following such statements, it has rightly been observed that 'L'*Inferno* dantesco è un inferno della memoria'.<sup>188</sup> The damned are presented as obsessed with their individual, private memories, and this obsession will only be intensified when at the Last Judgement, as Farinata explains, "del futuro fia chiusa la porta" (*Inf.X.108*).

The circular repetitiveness and lack of productivity of activity in Hell is especially evident from the *canti* of the thieves and the *canto* of the schismatics. In the former, Dante-pilgrim is horrified by the sight of the circular transformations of the damned souls from men into snakes and back again in an unending cycle. Vanni Fucci is bitten by a snake, burnt to a cinder, and then returns suddenly to his original state ("n quel medesmo ritornò

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<sup>187</sup> On these lines, see Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves*, pp. 177-83.

<sup>188</sup> Karlheinz Stierle, 'Mito, memoria e identità nella *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: Franco Casati, 1999), pp. 185-201 (p. 191).

di butto', *Inf.*XXIV.105). In the next *canto*, Dante-pilgrim witnesses an even more complicated metamorphosis, of man into snake and snake into man, with again ultimately a return to the starting point. The astounded exclamation of one damned soul who is watching this process, “‘Omè, Agnel, come ti muti!’” (*Inf.*XXV.68), misses the point that such constant change is actually an indication of a total lack of change, progress or improvement. Teodolinda Barolini comments that Dante here ‘implicitly defines pagan metamorphosis as repetitive, non-regenerative, and dead-ended, and contrasts it to Christian metamorphosis – conversion in this life and rebirth in the next’.<sup>189</sup> The reference to the phoenix, ‘la fenice [che] more e poi rinasce’ (*Inf.*XXIV.107), at this point is thus considered by Leonard Barkan to be ‘shockingly inappropriate’ since the usually Christological image of the resurrection is transformed into an endless, deadly cycle.<sup>190</sup>

In this sense metamorphosis also stands as a model more generally for the punitive logic of *Inferno*, which is defined in the *canto* of the ‘seminator di scandalo e di scisma’ as the ‘contrapasso’ (*Inf.*XXVIII.35 and 142).<sup>191</sup> Like the *lex talionis* of the Old Testament, punishment in Hell repeats the sin committed without any possibility of redemption or escape from the cycle of violence. Yet even more important than retribution is the allegorical significance of the ‘contrapasso’, which thus reveals the essence of the sin committed by the soul at the same time as it punishes the sinner: ‘sinners in the *Inferno* are punished in such a way that they act out, or embody, or become the victims (or all three) of the sins that they practiced in their lives’,<sup>192</sup> as I highlighted in the example of the infernal

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<sup>189</sup> Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 159.

<sup>190</sup> See Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 155.

<sup>191</sup> See Kenneth Gross, ‘Infernal Metamorphoses: An Interpretation of Dante’s “Counterpass”’, *Modern Language Notes*, 100 (1985), 42–69, and Peter Armour, ‘Dante’s *Contrapasso*: Contexts and Texts’, *Italian Studies*, 55 (2000), 1–20.

<sup>192</sup> Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, p. 142.

*accidiosi*. One of the schismatics describes how these souls circle round in an unending cycle of mutilation, mirroring their divisive practices during their lifetimes, followed by healing which is but temporary and in order for the initial bodily severance to be repeated *ad infinitum*:

‘Un diavolo è qua dietro che n’accisma  
sí crudelmente, al taglio de la spada  
rimettendo ciascun di questa risma,  
quand’ avem volta la dolente strada;  
però che le ferite son richiuse  
prima ch’altri dinanzi li rivada.’ (Inf.XXVIII.37-42)

Throughout Hell further examples of resistance to the future and to progress also abound in the stories the damned souls tell about their past lives. Capaneus, for instance, emblematises the total inability of the damned to change or learn from the past with his proud declaration “‘Qual io fui vivo, tal son morto’” (Inf.XIV.51). This statement has been suggested to be ‘the very blueprint of hell’<sup>193</sup> and to illustrate well the ‘tragedy of rigidity’ or ‘petrification of the damned personality’.<sup>194</sup> Certainly, Capaneus’s pithy self-analysis provides a useful gloss on the absolute identity between the present, endless *contrapasso* and the past sin, and encapsulates the inescapable repetition at the heart of the infernal experience.

My investigation thus far has established Dante’s *Inferno* as a site of infernal melancholia. I have found both that *acedia* has a specific location in Dante’s scheme (the end of *Inferno* VII) and that the characteristics of *acedia* resonate with the infernal situation more generally, where the themes of despair, darkness, and impeded speech recur with great frequency. It has also emerged that there are certain similarities between *acedia* and melancholia, particularly in Kristeva’s reformulation of Freudian melancholia which

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<sup>193</sup> Gagnolati, ‘Gluttony and the Anthropology of Pain in Dante’s *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*’, p. 245.

<sup>194</sup> Thomas M. Greene, ‘5. Dramas of Selfhood in the *Comedy*’, in *From Time to Eternity: Essays on Dante’s ‘Divine Comedy’*, ed. by Thomas G. Bergin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 103-36 (pp. 107 and 108).

highlights its adverse effects on language. It is perhaps possible to conclude that while the symptoms of both remain comparable, in particular the noted impediments to linguistic expression, the root causes are different. In the case of Freudian melancholia, the cause is, albeit unconsciously, loss, which in *Inferno* can be interpreted as loss of both earthly pleasures and of unity with God. As regards Dantean *acedia*, in contrast, I have found from both *Inferno* VII and *Purgatorio* XVII and XVIII that the cause is a lack of love for God. In the second half of this chapter, I explore how *Purgatorio* seeks to atone for infernal *acedia*, through liturgical language and music, and propose that the purgatorial process be understood as a form of ‘singing cure’. I also consider more closely the different functions repetition has in the first two *cantiche*, especially how repetition in *Purgatorio* is productive, enabling the carrying out of a work of mourning or detachment from earthly ties. Finally, I reflect on the extent to which Dante-pilgrim can be said to participate in the drama of purgatorial conversion to God.

### *The cure for acedia: Purgatory as liturgical speech therapy*

And prayer is more  
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation  
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.<sup>195</sup>

Traditionally, two remedies in particular have been adduced for *acedia*. The first is spiritual, suggesting that *acedia* can be combated by prayer and Scriptural invocation. The second is physical, and propounds that *acedia* is a result of idleness or laziness and can therefore be prevented by disciplined, manual labour. Cassian, for instance, only really considers the second option, drawing on Scriptural injunctions to hard physical work and harsh criticism

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<sup>195</sup> Lines from part I of ‘Little Gidding (1942)’, in T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), pp. 201-9 (p. 202).

of idleness in St Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians.<sup>196</sup> The first remedy is, in a sense, the appropriate course of action against any sin or temptation, and is not specific to *acedia* necessarily. Nonetheless, a linguistic remedy for *acedia* is particularly apt, since, as I have shown, it was, for instance, understood to be manifested as broken speech during church services. *Acedia* was also at times explicitly considered an impediment to reading or 'sacra lectione', for instance in the following words of Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel:

*Accediosus dicitur tediosus, anxius, vanae mentis vel animo levis, qui tedio mentis commotus vel levitate animi sublevatus nec se sinit legere nec alios lectioni sinit vacare, qui et sibi vagando inutilis et aliis legentibus invenitur esse contrarius. Otium enim et fabulas diligit, et ideo et se et alios a sacra lectione distollit id est segregat vel disturbat.*

*Affected with accidie means: 'bored', 'anxious', 'empty-headed and light-minded', someone who is affected by weariness of mind and lifted up by levity of spirit, does not permit himself to read or allow others to apply themselves to reading, who is both unprofitable to himself by his wandering about, and is at cross purposes with others who are reading. He loves idleness and gossip, and therefore he distracts both himself and others from sacred reading, that is, he takes them away from it and disturbs them.*<sup>197</sup>

Recommendations by monastic writers such as Evagrius Ponticus and St Basil to pray, read the Bible, and recite psalms are, therefore, thoughtful weapons against *acedia* as a verbal failing requiring linguistic correction.<sup>198</sup> For Peter of Celle, a twelfth-century writer, the cure for the 'noonday demon', *acedia*, is the reading of Scriptures so as to be able, like

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<sup>196</sup> See Cassian, *The Institutes*, book X, pp. 217–34 (*De institutis*, pp. 172–93), 2 Thessalonians: 3.6–15, and also, on physical work as a remedy for *acedia* as *otiositas*, James B. Williams, 'Working for Reform: *Acedia*, Benedict of Aniane and the Transformation of Working Culture in Carolingian Monasticism', in *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. by Richard G. Newhauser and Susan J. Ridyard (York: York Medieval Press, 2012), pp. 19–42.

<sup>197</sup> Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel, *Expositio in Regulam S. Benedicti*, ed. by Alfred Spannagel and Pius Engelbert OSB, *Corpus consuetudinum monasticarum*, 8 (Siegburg: Schmitt, 1974), p. 274; *Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict*, trans. by David Barry OSB, with introductory essays by Terrence Kardong OSB, Jean Leclercq OSB, and Daniel M. LaForte (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2007), p. 437.

<sup>198</sup> See Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, pp. 5 and 9. Evagrius Ponticus lists symptoms and Scriptural antidotes in *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons*, trans. by David Brakke (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 2009). See particularly books four and six on the demons of sadness and listlessness respectively (pp. 99–117, and pp. 133–46).

Christ tempted in the desert, to use quotations from the Bible to defend oneself.<sup>199</sup> Here, reading even when alone is no doubt reading aloud, if *sotto voce*.<sup>200</sup> In this manner, the verbal defence against *acedia* involves the physical (the act of speaking) as well as the linguistic (reading), a point to which I shall return.

In Dante, the cure for *acedia* draws on both remedies, the physical and the verbal. The *accidiosi* run unceasingly, even through the night (an anomaly in *Purgatorio*, where night is otherwise a time for rest). This is somewhat confusing, for the *accidiosi* would seem to be persisting in one key symptom of *acedia*, restlessness, and Cassian in fact specifically condemns running (in the form of flight, that is, running away) as an inappropriate response to *acedia*. According to Cassian, the individual suffering from *acedia* must, instead, stay put, in one place, and resist all temptation to pointless, evasive, restless tactics.<sup>201</sup> Running would then be a continuation of *acedia*, rather than a counterbalancing measure.<sup>202</sup>

It is not impossible for the purifying, corrective punishments in *Purgatorio* to work as a continuation of the sin punished (the avaricious, for instance, have their gaze focused on earthly things, rather than on God), but it is more common for the physical punishment to somehow oppose the vice (hence the proud have bowed heads, and the gluttonous are starved). For Dante, we have seen that *acedia* in Hell is represented by immobility and the heaviness keeping the souls submerged at the bottom of the Styx, so in this sense running is in opposition to the manifestation of the sin as inertia (but not as restlessness, one of Cassian's key symptoms). Moreover, Virgil glosses *acedia* for Dante-pilgrim as a lack of zeal, of which anyone who “con men che non dee corre nel bene” is guilty (*Purg.*XVII.101). In

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<sup>199</sup> See Peter of Celle, ‘On Affliction and Reading’, in *Selected Works*, trans. by Hugh Feiss (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987), pp. 131–41 (p. 134); ‘De afflictione et lectione’, in *La Spiritualité de Pierre de Celle*, ed. by Jean Leclercq (Paris: J. Vrin, 1946), pp. 231–9 (p. 233).

<sup>200</sup> See Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 119.

<sup>201</sup> Cassian, *The Institutes*, X, XXV (p. 234); *De institutis*, p. 193.

<sup>202</sup> This is Vazzana's conclusion, *Il contrappasso nella ‘Divina Commedia’*, pp. 198–9.

this sense, running is an appropriate remedy for *acedia*, providing we remember that the souls are not running aimlessly, but rather are running towards the ‘bene’ which is ultimately God.

The examples of running (Mary running to see Elizabeth, from Luke 1:39–40, and Caesar rushing to victory in Spain, drawn from Lucan’s *Pharsalia*)<sup>203</sup> and of a lack of zeal (the Jews who perish in the desert having rebelled against Moses’s leadership, as narrated in Numbers 1:1–38, and those who remain in Sicily refusing to continue to follow Aeneas, as related towards the end of book v of Virgil’s *Aeneid*) combine, as always in *Purgatorio*, the biblical and the Classical, the Christian and the pagan. It has been argued that Dante’s use of the example of Caesar’s speediness, on the terrace of sloth, indicates that *acedia* is not to be understood as insufficient spiritual zeal, but rather as any lack of enthusiasm in doing one’s duty, whether civic or religious. Such a view, however, seems too general, ignoring as it does both Dante’s choice of a religious figure to represent this terrace (the erstwhile abbot of San Zeno), and the presence of Classical, non-Christian *exempla* throughout the mountain of Purgatory, which is not intended to belie the true nature of the specifically Christian sins punished on each terrace. While sloth did gradually come to mean negligence in one’s duties beyond the spiritual sphere, such an understanding of the sin was not the norm in Dante’s day.

The verbal remedy Dante uses for *acedia* in *Purgatorio* is, unlike the physical remedy, unambiguously appropriate. The quick, clear, and useful speech of the purgatorial *accidiosi* (reinforced by verbs such as ‘gridavan’, *Purg.*XVIII.99) contrasts with the impeded speech of their infernal counterparts which Virgil had to interpret and vocalise. In fact, the *accidiosi* are the first souls in Purgatory to speak the exemplary penitential reminders

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<sup>203</sup> See Lucan, *The Civil War (Pharsalia)* trans. by J.D. Duff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 146/7 (book III, vv. 453–5).

themselves. The proud *read* the examples on the floor and wall sculptures, the envious *listened* to disembodied voices, invisible ‘spiriti parlando’ (*Purg.*XIII.26), reciting the examples, and the angry *saw* ecstatic visions. The *accidiosi* are the first group of souls in *Purgatorio* to have the privilege of *voicing* the exemplary pronouncements which John Barnes has described as ‘pseudo-antiphons’.<sup>204</sup> The centrality of clearly audible and repetitive speech on the terrace of *acedia* provides further confirmation of the identification of the submerged souls suffering from impeded speech in *Inferno* VII as *accidiosi*. Those who have repented and are willingly purging themselves of *acedia* are rewarded, in Dante’s scheme, by a restoration of their self-expressive abilities. *Acedia* can thus be said to be cured in *Purgatorio* through a form of speech therapy; the purgatorial *accidiosi* speak clearly, enthusiastically, and immediately, in contrast to their infernal counterparts whose speech is impeded and incomprehensible.

The terraces of the avaricious and the prodigal, and of the lustful are also characterised by an emphasis on speech; here, as on the terrace of *acedia*, the souls recite the set examples and counterexamples, as if it is only at this later stage of *Purgatorio* that the souls can finally engage their tongues as well as their bodies in the specific purgation process. The souls are able to reach this final stage of linguistic emancipation thanks to the curative power of liturgical language throughout the mountain, that is, because of the psalms, hymns, and prayers with which they have already trained their mouths and minds. I propose that, beyond the specific case of the *accidiosi*, the liturgical language spoken and sung by the souls

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<sup>204</sup> Barnes, ‘Vestiges of the Liturgy in Dante’s Verse’, p. 255. Matthew Treherne, however, considers that ‘no liturgy is performed’ on the terrace of the slothful: ‘Liturgical Personhood: Creation, Penitence, and Praise in the *Commedia*’, in *Dante’s ‘Commedia’: Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 131–60 (p. 134). This would be an appropriate reflection of the sin punished (which entailed, as we have seen, in life a failure to attend a church and a lack of attention and completeness in reciting the liturgy in church when present), although I would tend to agree with Barnes that the words the purgatorial *accidiosi* utter are pseudo-liturgical, part of a new liturgy Dante himself has fashioned for this *cantica*.

in Purgatory, heard by Dante-pilgrim and recorded by Dante-poet acts as a 'talking' or 'singing cure'.

The term 'talking cure' was coined by one of the first patients treated according to the proto-psychoanalytical method and whose diagnosis and treatment is the first case history in Freud and Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria*. Anna O., as the patient is named in the *Studies*, suffered from both physical and linguistic difficulties, which included paraphasia (disordered speech), a nervous cough, somnambulism, and partial paralysis. Strikingly, we can, in retrospect, interpret Anna O.'s speech impediment as an example of what Kristeva was later to define melancholic language. After all, Anna O.'s problems started when her father fell gravely ill and eventually died (in April 1881). Breuer's description of her linguistic breakdown in the later stages of her father's illness reads as follows, and is worth quoting at length for the similarities it bears to Kristevan melancholic asymbolia:

Alongside the development of the contractures there appeared a deep-going functional disorganization of her speech. It first became noticeable that she was at a loss to find words, and this difficulty gradually increased. Later she lost her command of grammar and syntax; she no longer conjugated verbs, and eventually she used only infinitives, for the most part incorrectly formed from weak past participles; and she omitted both the definite and indefinite article. In the process of time she became almost completely deprived of words. She put them together laboriously out of four or five languages and became almost unintelligible. When she tried to write (until her contractures entirely prevented her doing so) she employed the same jargon. For two weeks she became completely dumb and in spite of making great and continuous efforts to speak she was unable to say a syllable. (*SE* II:25)

The progressive breakdown of Anna O.'s linguistic capabilities mirrors that of the Kristevan melancholic.

Breuer continues, noting that the solution to Anna O.'s anxiety was through forcing her (via hypnosis) to achieve a clarity and control of language:

And now for the first time the psychical mechanism of the disorder became clear. As I knew, she had felt very much offended over something and had determined not to speak about it. When I guessed this and obliged her to talk about it, the inhibition,

which had made any other kind of utterance impossible as well, disappeared. (*SE* II:25)

It is the recuperation of broken, failed language, through language itself, that Anna O. is recorded as having ‘aptly described [...], speaking seriously, as a “talking cure”’ (*SE* II:30). Gragnolati has amply demonstrated that the ‘processo curativo’<sup>205</sup> of passing through Purgatory is one that relies on what he defines as ‘productive pain’ inflicted on the body and through which the suffering individual is able to identify with and share in Christ’s redemptive physical suffering on the Cross.<sup>206</sup> *Purgatorio*, I argue, should also be understood as a form of productive liturgical performance, which allows the purging souls to participate in a form of speech therapy analogous to the Freudian ‘talking cure’, one which is at the same time a form of music therapy or a ‘talking cure’ set to music. Francesco Ciabattoni has placed in its historical context the musical journey of Dante-pilgrim from ‘*Inferno*’s Unholy Racket’ to the paradisaical music of the spheres, via purgatorial liturgical music as *pharmakon*.<sup>207</sup> The pilgrim’s journey, however, can also be illuminated by comparison and engagement with Freudian categories from infernal broken, melancholic language to the speech therapy of *Purgatorio*.

Of course, there are important differences between the two types of speech therapy. Most notably, the Dantean form of speech therapy found in *Purgatorio* is, as we shall see, focused on a collective, disciplined, ritualistic, external, fixed, authoritative, traditional, musical use of liturgical language. Such a language is a far cry from the self-centred, internal, individualistic, unscripted talk required in psychoanalytical treatment and which relies in

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<sup>205</sup> Manuele Gragnolati and Christoph Holzhey, ‘Dolore come gioia. Trasformarsi nel *Purgatorio* di Dante’, *Psiche*, 2 (2003), 111–26 (p. 116).

<sup>206</sup> Manuele Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 89–137.

<sup>207</sup> See, in particular, Francesco Ciabattoni, *Dante’s Journey to Polyphony* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 92–153; and, more generally, *Music and Medicine: The History of Music Therapy Since Antiquity*, ed. by Peregrine Horden (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

large part originally on hypnosis (in the case of Anna O. for instance) and later on free association to reveal the disruptive forces at work in the individual patient's unconscious. Yet the crucial similarity remains that throughout both a Freudian psychoanalysis and Dante's mountain of Purgatory, language is seen as curative and therapeutic, as a way of healing the past physical and linguistic symptoms of the sufferer, whether patient or repentant sinner. Moreover, each 'cure' takes place in a dialogical situation, where the interlocutor (in psychoanalysis, the analyst; in liturgy, God) by listening albeit silently thereby valorises the words of the speaker(s) and ensures the success of the performative utterances. The analysand is never as alone as the sinners in *Inferno*.

I have shown that Dante's Hell is characterised by a form of melancholic language that is most pronounced in the case of the *accidiosi* in *canto VII*, but which is to be found throughout the infernal realm. In the light of this observation, it is evidently appropriate and necessary that the task of Purgatory is to learn how to use language properly again.<sup>208</sup> This is why it is vital that the purgatorial *accidiosi* themselves pronounce the biblical and pagan examples that help them to atone for their past *acedia* or linguistic insufficiencies. Yet the importance of language for the purging souls is not restricted to one terrace alone. Instead, as with the ubiquity of linguistic impediment in *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* is brimming with instances where language and music are a fundamental part of the souls' journey. It is important to remember, nonetheless, that language is a means to restoring a right relationship with God, but never an end in itself, so that once language has enabled the transformation of the purgatorial souls, it becomes superfluous in *Paradiso*.

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<sup>208</sup> Various studies have assessed this thematic in Dante through a focus on the imagery of baby-language in the *Commedia*. See, for instance, Vittorio Montemaggi, 'In Unknowability as Love: The Theology of Dante's *Commedia*', in *Dante's 'Commedia': Theology as Poetry*, pp. 60-94 (especially p. 82 on 'the apophatic and infant-like ability to learn how to speak anew'); Gary Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body*; Robert Hollander, *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1979), pp. 115-29.

It is worth enumerating some examples of such instances of purgatorial liturgy. Firstly, it is interesting to note the repeated singing of hymns in *Purgatorio*, which stands in direct contrast to the broken, meaningless ‘inno’ of the infernal *accidiosi*. The souls in the Valley of the Princes sing the Compline hymn “‘*Te lucis ante [terminum]*’” (*Purg.*VIII.13) as well as the Marian antiphon “‘*Salve, Regina*’” (*Purg.*VII.82).<sup>209</sup> On the last terrace Dante-pilgrim hears the hymn “‘*Summae Deus clementiae*’” (*Purg.*XXV.121) sung by the lustful repeatedly (‘ricominciavan’, *Purg.*XXV.129; ‘al cantar tornavano’, *Purg.*XXV.133; ‘tornan, lagrimando, a’ primi canti’, *Purg.*XXVI.47), interspersed with biblical and Classical phrases relating either to chastity or to sinful love (*Purg.*XXV–XXVI). This hymn is particularly appropriate, since it includes lines that speak of the quenching of the fires of lust.<sup>210</sup> On entering Purgatory proper it is also notable that the first sound Dante-pilgrim hears is the singing of “‘*Te Deum laudamus*’” (*Purg.*IX.140), sung daily at the end of Matins except during Advent and Lent. This hymn immediately marks the terraces as places dedicated to the worship and praise of God (unlike the curses which greet Dante’s ears in *Inferno* III),<sup>211</sup> and is particularly fitting given the Easter setting of Dante-pilgrim’s journey and the resurrectional hope of *Purgatorio* more generally, since the *Te Deum* reappears strikingly after its Lenten silencing at Matins on Easter Sunday.<sup>212</sup> Even more significantly, the *Te Deum* is, as Francesco Buti notes in his commentary, a hymn sung when monks renounce the world: ‘questo si suole cantare da’ cherici quando uno omo esce del mondo, e va a la

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<sup>209</sup> See Andrew McCracken, ‘In Omnibus Viis Tuis: Compline in the Valley of the Rulers (*Purg.*VII–VIII)’, *Dante Studies*, 111 (1993), 119–29; Mark Musa, *Advent at the Gates: Dante’s ‘Comedy’* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), pp. 85–109; and also Dante Balboni’s entry for ‘inno’ in *ED*, III, p. 455.

<sup>210</sup> See Barnes, ‘Vestiges of the Liturgy in Dante’s Verse’, p. 237.

<sup>211</sup> ‘Bestemmiavano Dio e lor parenti, | l’umana spezie e ’l loco e ’l tempo e ’l seme | di lor semenza e di lor nascimenti’ (*Inf.*III.103–5).

<sup>212</sup> Evelyn Birge Vitz, ‘The Liturgy and Vernacular Literature’, in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter, 2nd edn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), pp. 503–63 (p. 540), and on Dante, especially pp. 533–45.

religione’.<sup>213</sup> In this respect, all the souls inside Purgatory proper can be said to be monks and nuns, participating fully in the singing of hymns, while the medieval laity would mainly instead only have listened.

Similarly, psalms are sung throughout Purgatorio, again in contrast to Hell, where Nimrod’s incomprehensible speech is defined precisely in terms of his inability to recite ‘dolci salmi’ (*Inf*.XXXI.69), a restriction all the damned souls share. We get a glimpse of Dante-pilgrim’s personal relationship to the psalms in *Paradiso* XXV. When asked by St James to define hope, Dante-pilgrim, having given the appropriate reply (that hope is the act of looking forward to eternal life, “uno attender certo | de la gloria futura”, *Par*. XXV.67-8), continues:

‘Da molte stelle mi vien questa luce;  
ma quei la distillò nel mio cor pria  
che fu sommo cantor del sommo duce.  
“Sperino in te”, ne la sua tēodia  
dice, “color che sanno il nome tuo”.’                      (*Par*.XXV.70-4)<sup>214</sup>

Dante-pilgrim is translating from Psalm 9.11, which reads in the Vulgate ‘et sperent in te qui noverunt nomen tuum’ (*‘And let them trust in thee who know thy name’*). Here Dante-pilgrim reveals his understanding of the psalms as a divine poetry of hope, and thus retrospectively highlights the appropriateness of the centrality of psalms in *Purgatorio*, the realm of hope. As the first description of the purgatorial souls in the *Commedia* indicates, these souls are able to change and hope for a precise and certain future, unlike their infernal

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<sup>213</sup> *Commento di Francesco da Buti sopra la ‘Divina Comedia’ di Dante Allighieri*, ed. by Crescentino Giannini, 3 vols (Pisa: Fratelli Nistri, 1858-62), II (1860), p. 218.

<sup>214</sup> On the significance of this passage in *Paradiso*, see Kevin Brownlee, ‘Why the Angels Speak Italian: Dante as Vernacular Poet in *Paradiso* XXV’, *Poetics Today*, 5 (1984), 597-610 (pp. 598-9), and also Angelo Penna’s entry for ‘salmo’, *ED*, IV, pp. 1078-9. On this examination on the theological virtues as itself a performance, see Robin Kirkpatrick, ‘Polemics of Praise: Theology as Text, Narrative, and Rhetoric in Dante’s *Commedia*’, in *Dante’s ‘Commedia’: Theology as Poetry*, pp. 14-35: ‘When, for instance, Dante is examined in Faith, Hope, and Charity in *Paradiso* 24-26, nothing is at stake. Dante is never going to botch his answers and so return in dudgeon to the dark wood of *Inferno* 1. The whole thing is a performance’ (p. 25).

counterparts: “e vederai color che son contenti | nel foco, perché speran di venire | quando che sia a le beate genti” (*Inf.*1.118-20).

In the *Convivio*, Dante laments that the psalms have lost their beauty in translation:

E però sappia ciascuno che nulla cosa per legame musaico armonizzata si può della sua loquela in altra transmutare, senza rompere tutta sua dolcezza ed armonia. [...] E questa è la cagione per che i versi del Salterio sono senza dolcezza di musica e d'armonia: ché essi furono transmutati d'ebreo in greco e di greco in latino, e nella prima trasmutazione tutta quella dolcezza venne meno.<sup>215</sup>

By retranslating the psalms into an Italian context (either by integrating Latin fragments into Italian syntax and rhyme, or by providing a vernacular translation as above in *Paradiso* XXV), Dante perhaps seeks to re-bestow on the psalms some of their original linguistic beauty.

Dante-poet's praise of David the psalmist, above, as 'sommo cantor del sommo duce' is important evidence of his own self-identification with the biblical poet-king.<sup>216</sup> In the words of Harold Bloom:

Dante has nothing positive to say about any of his poetic precursors or contemporaries and remarkably little pragmatic use for the Bible, except for the Psalms. It is as though he felt King David, ancestor of Christ, was the only forerunner worthy of him, the only other poet consistently able to express the truth.<sup>217</sup>

In this sense, we must take seriously the suggestion that Dante wrote the *Commedia*, following the role the psalms are acknowledged to play for Dante-pilgrim, in order to

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<sup>215</sup> *Convivio*, II, p. 30 (trattato primo, VII 14-15). On Dante's changing attitude to the psalms and particularly their suitability as a poetic model because of their 'sweetness', see Simone Marchesi, *Dante and Augustine: Linguistics, Poetics, Hermeneutics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 95-106.

<sup>216</sup> See Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the 'Comedy'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 275-8; Theresa Federici, 'Dante's Davidic Journey: From Sinner to God's Scribe', in *Dante's 'Commedia': Theology as Poetry*, pp. 180-209; Giuseppe Ledda, 'La danza e il canto dell' « umile salmista »: David nella *Commedia* di Dante', in *La Figure de Dante entre profane et sacré dans l'Europe des siècles XIVe-XVIe*, ed. by Elise Boillet and Sonia Cavicchioli (Geneva: Droz, forthcoming). Federici suggests, p. 208, n. 39, that the Psalter may even be a structural model for the *Commedia*: 'The Book of Psalms was commonly divided into three sections: *in poenitentia*, *in iustitia*, and *in laude*. [...] The division of the Psalms into three distinct sections is also mirrored in the structure of the *Commedia*. Dante would have been well aware of this exegetical commonplace [e.g. from Peter Lombard's *Commentarium in Psalmos*] when creating his tripartite division of the *Commedia* and when constructing the literary identity of the pilgrim.'

<sup>217</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), p. 78.

provide his readers, similarly, with hope of eternal salvation. In *Purgatorio*, the souls who died sudden, violent deaths and repented at the last moment sing Psalm 50, “*Miserere*” (*Purg.*v.24), while verse 17 of this same psalm, “*Labia mēa, Domine*”, is recited by the gluttonous later in Purgatory (*Purg.*XXIII.11).<sup>218</sup> The avaricious and prodigal recite Psalm 118.25, “*Adhaesit pavimento anima mea*” (*Purg.*XIX.73), and the souls arriving on the shores of Purgatory sing Psalm 113.<sup>219</sup>

The psalms formed the backbone of medieval liturgy, and all one hundred and fifty of them would be sung on a weekly basis in the Divine Office in monasteries, although it is doubtful how much of these devotions Dante would have heard first-hand. It is more likely that Dante would have known the psalms from private reading and meditation. The psalms also formed a central part of learning to read in the medieval curriculum; in this respect, the purgatorial souls can be considered to return to the basics of their education.<sup>220</sup> In the words of Pierre Riché, from the early Middle Ages onwards, ‘Savoir lire c’est connaître son psautier’.<sup>221</sup> All the souls in Purgatory, and not only the *accidiosi*, can thus be seen to be participating in an educative course of learning how to read and how to speak again. In this, the purgatorial souls must rely on their memory, since each recites the psalms by heart, and not from an actual, physical text in front of them. Indeed, the psalms were particularly associated with the art of memory, as Mary Carruthers has investigated.<sup>222</sup> Hugh of St Victor,

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<sup>218</sup> See Robert Hollander, *Studies in Dante*, pp. 107–13.

<sup>219</sup> On this psalm’s role in the *Commedia*, see Charles Singleton, “‘In Exitu Israel de Aegypto’”, in *Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp. 102–21.

<sup>220</sup> See, for instance, in an English context, George H. Brown, ‘The Psalms as the Foundation of Anglo-Saxon Learning’, in *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Nancy Van Deusen (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 1–24.

<sup>221</sup> Pierre Riché, *Éducation et culture dans l’occident barbare VI<sup>e</sup> – VIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1962), p. 516. See also his ‘Le Psautier, livre de lecture élémentaire d’après les vies des saints mérovingiens’, in *Études mérovingiennes: Actes des Journées de Poitiers 1<sup>er</sup>–3 Mai 1952* (Paris: Picard, 1953), pp. 253–6.

<sup>222</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 80–121. On Dante and the art of memory, see Lina Bolzoni, ‘Dante o della memoria appassionata’, *Lettere italiane*, 60:2 (2008), 169–93.

for instance, uses the mnemonic links between a psalm's number, its first line, and subsequent verses and verse numbers, as an illustration of the reliable and helpful structuring of one's memory.<sup>223</sup> Dante's use of fragmentary lines from the psalms perhaps facilitates or reflects this mental assimilation of the psalms via small, memorable, manageable sections, which can be re-collected as part of new texts, whether sermons or otherwise (*Purgatorio* itself, for instance). In reciting psalms, the purgatorial souls exercise their memory as well as their tongues.

The psalms are also an important model for the *Commedia* in that they allow for a dialogue with God that is at once collective and intimate. As Annie Sutherland has shown, the psalms are particularly attractive because of their emphasis on the first-person singular, and their constant, direct address to God ('tu'). In this way, the individual is provided with a performative vocabulary to express, explore and expand on his or her relationship with God.<sup>224</sup> This personal experience is, importantly, grounded in a public, collective mode, and this aspect of psalmody is stressed throughout *Purgatorio*, from the first psalm Dante-pilgrim hears and which is sung 'tutti insieme ad una voce' (*Purg.*II.47). The importance of voices in unison is, similarly, highlighted in the recitation of the 'Agnus Dei' by the angry: 'una parola in tutte era e un modo, | sì che pareva tra esse ogne concordia' (*Purg.*XVI.20-1). Absolute unity is consistently both verbal and social. From this perspective, it is evident that the episode of Casella's song functions as an *exemplum in malo* of the utility of singing in *Purgatorio*. Casella's song is profane rather than sacred,<sup>225</sup> monodic rather than choral,<sup>226</sup> and

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<sup>223</sup> See William W. Green, 'Hugo of St Victor: "De tribus maximis circumstantiis gestorum"', *Speculum*, 18 (1943), 484-93.

<sup>224</sup> See Annie Sutherland, 'Performing the Penitential Psalms in the Middle Ages: Maidstone and Bampton', in *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, pp. 15-38.

<sup>225</sup> Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Canzone sacra e canzone profana', in *La musica nel tempo di Dante: Atti, Ravenna, 12-14 settembre 1986*, ed. by Luigi Pestalozza (Milan: Unicopli, 1988), pp. 206-21.

personal and backwards-looking (for Dante),<sup>227</sup> rather than collective and future-orientated as the liturgy is. It causes stasis in performer and audience alike, whereas psalms and hymns accompany and encourage movement and progress and produce change.<sup>228</sup>

In contrast to the Casella episode, the unison speech and song of *Purgatorio* foster community, following Dante's belief that the path to human happiness lies in the fulfilling of the potential inherent in Aristotelian dictum that 'l'uomo naturalmente è compagnevole animale'.<sup>229</sup> As such, true happiness, according to Dante's *Purgatorio*, can only be achieved through a language in which all can participate equally.<sup>230</sup> The centrality of language to the creation of communities is, moreover, particularly true for the liturgy, which not only reinforces but even creates a worshipping community that is the earthly continuation of Christ's body on Earth, and this community is one that, dizzyingly, goes beyond the immediate to incorporate all Christians past and present. As Vittorio Montemaggi proposes, 'for Dante an important part of the theological value of the poem is its narrative creation of communities that Christically participate (in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*) or fail to participate (in *Inferno*) in the love which God is.'<sup>231</sup> Liturgy allows communication between the Church Militant (on Earth), the Church Suffering (in Purgatory) and the Church Triumphant (in

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<sup>226</sup> Nancy A. Jones, 'Music and the Maternal Voice in *Purgatorio* XIX', in *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, ed. by Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 35-49 (p. 40).

<sup>227</sup> On the narcissism of Dante-pilgrim's temporary, blind (or deaf?) identification with his former self and his former poetry, see Alan Levitan, 'Dante as Listener, Cato's Rebuke, and Virgil's Self-Reproach', *Dante Studies*, 103 (1985), 37-55.

<sup>228</sup> Amilcare A. Iannucci, 'Casella's Song and the Tuning of the Soul', *Thought*, 65 (1990), 27-46.

<sup>229</sup> *Convivio*, II, p. 275 (IV, iv, 1).

<sup>230</sup> Claire Honess rightly highlights Dante's belief in the 'importance of language, as the primary civilizing influence, which enables human beings to live and interact in an ordered political and social existence'. See her 'Communication and Participation in Dante's *Commedia*', in *In Amicizia: Essays in Honour of Giulio Lepschy*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Lino Pertile, *The Italianist*, 17, special supplement (Reading: University of Reading, 1997), pp. 127-45 (p. 142).

<sup>231</sup> Vittorio Montemaggi, 'In Unknowability as Love: The Theology of Dante's *Commedia*', p. 76.

Paradise).<sup>232</sup> There is thus constant communion between the living and the dead. A large part of Dante's brilliance, in proposing a concrete and very thoughtfully structured example of what Purgatory might be like, is that he transplants earthly liturgy into the Afterlife, thereby reinforcing the bonds between the souls on Earth and in Purgatory and achieving a sense of prayerful and liturgical symbiosis. In order to foster links between the earthly Church and the departed souls – an aim which was a key catalyst in the development of the concept of Purgatory<sup>233</sup> – Dante chooses a shared language already familiar to and beloved of his readers. This presence of the established liturgy in Purgatory aids the sense that the middle realm is the most recognisable and earthly of the three realms of Dante's *Commedia*. Given such observations, the force of lines stressing the unity of voices in *Purgatorio* becomes even more marked. Learning how to speak and even to sing again, together and in unison, is part of the journey of learning how to live together peaceably, and a means of moving from the 'monomania' of Hell to the ideal society and ideal Church in process in Purgatory and fully imagined in Paradise.<sup>234</sup> In Peter Hawkins's characterisation of Dante's *Purgatorio*, 'Gone are the operatic soloists of *Inferno*, each singing the words of his or her life song, and nobody listening to anyone else. In their place are individuals discovering

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<sup>232</sup> On the fostering of community via the sung liturgy, see: Erminia Ardissino, 'I canti liturgici nel *Purgatorio* dantesco', *Dante Studies*, 108 (1990), 39–65; and Louis M. La Favia, "...Chè quivi per canti..." (*Purg.*, XII, 113), Dante's Programmatic Use of Psalms and Hymns in the *Purgatorio*, *Studies in Iconography*, 9 (1984–86), 53–65.

<sup>233</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), and Brian Patrick McGuire, 'Purgatory, the Communion of Saints, and Medieval Change', *Viator*, 20 (1989), 61–84.

<sup>234</sup> See Joan M. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the 'Divine Comedy'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). I take the identification of *Inferno* as a site of monomania from Peter S. Hawkins, who argues that 'Here the self is sovereign, frozen in obsessive monomania – always alone no matter how dense the crowd.' *Dante: A Brief History*, p. 40. See also, more generally, Marina Van Zuylen, *Monomania: The Flight from Everyday Life in Literature and Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

what it means to be members of a choir, to make music together. Communion becomes a way of life.<sup>235</sup>

This creation of community through unison speech and song is rendered possible by the dual status of the first person singular, which is personal and yet stands for a collective, Every(wo)man in the case of the *Commedia*, and the Church in the case of the psalms.<sup>236</sup> I would argue that Dante seeks to channel the performative force of the psalms in his own poetry not only by incorporating snatches of psalms into his own writing, but by adopting some of their characteristics, such as precisely the psalms' use of 'deeply felt and wide-ranging first person utterances',<sup>237</sup> as noted by Sutherland. Yet in Dante, the intimate, direct, emotive I/you relationship is transposed from the psalms (between the psalmist and God) into the *Commedia* itself, where the relationship established is not only between the individual and God, but also, crucially, between poet and reader. In the psalms, the 'You' is primarily God, as in the final *canto* of *Paradiso*, for instance,<sup>238</sup> but throughout the *Commedia* Dante also frequently addresses the reader either explicitly as 'lettore' or as an implicit second person interlocutor.<sup>239</sup> One of the most emotional points is in *Paradiso*, where Dante-poet exhorts 'Leva dunque, lettore, a l'alte rote | meco la vista' (*Par.X.7-8*, my

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<sup>235</sup> Peter S. Hawkins, *Dante's Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>236</sup> See Michael P. Kuczynski, 'The Psalms and Social Action in Late Medieval Prayer', in *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages*, pp. 191-214. Kuczynski notes, referring to Augustine's commentary on Psalm 50, 'as Augustine and all the commentators who follow him agree, in the Psalms David always speaks both in his own person and in the person of *ecclesia*, the Church' (p. 194).

<sup>237</sup> Sutherland, 'Performing the Penitential Psalms in the Middle Ages', pp. 17-18.

<sup>238</sup> Particularly in the lines describing the Trinity, *Par.XXXIII.124-6*: 'O luce eterna che sola in te sidi, | sola t'intendi, e da te intelletta | e intendente te ami e arridi!'

<sup>239</sup> See Erich Auerbach, 'Dante's Addresses to the Reader', *Romance Philology*, 7 (1953-54), 268-79; Leo Spitzer, 'The Addresses to the Reader in the *Commedia*', *Italica* 32/3 (1955), 143-65; Vittorio Russo, 'appello al lettore', in *ED*, 1, pp. 324-6, and *Esperienza e/di letture dantesche tra il 1966 e il 1970* (Naples: Liguori, 1971), pp. 211-31; Rossella D'Alfonso, *Il dialogo con Dio nella 'Divina Commedia'* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1988); William Franke, *Dante's Interpretive Journey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 37-81; Paolo De Ventura, 'Il dialogo con il lettore e gli appelli agli ascoltatori nella *Commedia*', *Dante: Rivista internazionale di studi danteschi*, 1 (2004), 64-82. More generally, on the linguistic device itself, see Jonathan Culler, 'Apostrophe', *Diacritics*, 7 (1977), 59-69.

emphasis). Here perfect harmony is desired between narrator and reader just as between souls in Purgatory. Similarly, in *Inferno*, the poet prays, shifting from the optative to the imperative: ‘Se Dio ti lasci, lettor, prender frutto | di tua lezione, or pensa per te stesso’ (*Inf.XX.19–20*), while in *Purgatorio* comparable invocations are frequent (e.g. ‘Aguzza qui, lettor, ben li occhi al vero’, *Purg.VIII.19*). The performance of the *Commedia* involves not only Dante-pilgrim, Dante-poet, or the purgatorial souls, but also, importantly, the reader, who is constantly exhorted to participate in the poetry as a means of self-examination, purgation, and redirecting one’s gaze to God. The fruit to be gathered thoughtfully requires performative reading, in a manner akin to monastic *lectio*.<sup>240</sup>

Moreover, the souls in *Purgatorio*, except for those who already led a clerical life on Earth, are in fact singing the psalms for the first time, however many times they would have read the psalms aloud to themselves or heard them performed in religious services. In this, the passage from earthly life to the afterlife in Purgatory is a process of incorporation of each individual into a collective, wholly religious life. Francesco D’Ovidio is quite right, then, to describe Dante’s middle realm as ‘un colossale monastero salmeggiante’.<sup>241</sup> As Christopher Page among others has explored, although the early Church does seem to have permitted and even encouraged congregational singing (of psalms in particular), throughout the Middle Ages a progressive ‘silencing of the [layman’s] voice in liturgical chanting’ took place in favour of the use of professional, trained, authorised singers.<sup>242</sup> Thus it was that ‘The medieval liturgy had little place for the active involvement of the laity’ since instead ‘Their

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<sup>240</sup> On *lectio* as reading aloud and *meditatio* as silent reading, see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 170–4.

<sup>241</sup> Francesco D’Ovidio, *Nuovi studii danteschi: Il ‘Purgatorio’ e il suo preludio* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1906), p. 158.

<sup>242</sup> Christopher Page, *The Christian West and its Singers: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 197.

role was passive and devotional'.<sup>243</sup> Indeed, it was not until after the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s that the Catholic Church would re-authorise the congregational singing of psalms and hymns, amongst other liturgical changes, in a return to or re-valorisation of the notion that participation should mean vocalisation, rather than merely listening.<sup>244</sup> From the perspective of the collective, unified singing seen as necessary and useful in *Purgatorio*, this is a move which we can assume Dante would have approved, although it is very far from his own reality.

This is not to demean the devotional power of listening alone, particularly since, in the Middle Ages, listening was considered a form of reading. As Lombardi summarises, 'Importantly, one did not need to be literate in order to be a reader, since reading took place through the ears as well as with eyes. The person who listens to a book being read aloud is as much a reader as the person actually scanning the text.'<sup>245</sup> However, I believe that it is essential to emphasise the new type of reading in which the purgatorial souls participate, and which relies on the physicality of vocalisation (human sound production) as much as on the meaning of the words. The element of vocalisation is an important part of the embodied experience of Dante's *Purgatorio*,<sup>246</sup> and would have represented an important difference in the typical lay experience of the earthly liturgy. This physicality can be helpfully illuminated

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<sup>243</sup> John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century: A Historical Introduction and Guide for Students and Musicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 40.

<sup>244</sup> See 'Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy', in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by Walter M. Abbott (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), pp. 135–82, especially the declaration, p. 144, that 'Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy'.

<sup>245</sup> Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves*, p. 213. Lombardi points the reader to the work of Dennis H. Green, including *Medieval Listening and Reading: The Primary Reception of German Literature 800–1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 84: 'It is a peculiarity of the medieval position that a verb [in Latin, *legere*; in German *lesen*] which nowadays is used almost entirely of private reading could be employed of an audience, possibly entirely illiterate, but perhaps also including literates, listening to one person who alone was active in reading.' See also Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>246</sup> On Dante's embodied Afterlife, see Gagnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife*, and Rachel Jacoff, 'Our Bodies, Our Selves: The Body in the *Commedia*', in *Sparks and Seeds: Medieval Literature and Its Afterlife: Essays in Honor of John Freccero*, ed. by Alison Cornish and Dana E. Stewart (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 119–37.

by the *De vulgari eloquentia*, in which Dante emphasises the dual status of language as both rational (abstract, meaningful) and physical (sensual, perceptible):

Hoc equidem signum est ipsum subiectum nobile de quo loquimur: nam sensuale quid est in quantum sonus est; rationale vero in quantum aliquid significare videtur ad placitum.<sup>247</sup>

*This sign is precisely the noble subject of my treatise: for it is sensory in that it is sound and rational in that it can be seen to signify anything, according to man's will.*<sup>248</sup>

More specifically, the importance of vocalisation in devotional activities is stressed by Aquinas, who states both that ‘laus vocalis ad hoc necessaria est ut affectus hominis provocetur in Deum’,<sup>249</sup> ‘*the praise of the voice is necessary in order to arouse man's devotion towards God*’,<sup>250</sup> and that ‘Et ideo necessaria est laus oris, non quidem propter Deum, sed propter ipsum laudantem: cuius affectus excitatur in Deum ex laude ipsius’,<sup>251</sup> ‘*we need to praise God with our lips, not indeed for His sake, but for our own sake; since by praising him our devotion is aroused towards Him*’.<sup>252</sup> Such views undoubtedly underpin the emphasis on speaking and singing in Dante's *Purgatorio*, but they also help to explain the continuing importance of verbal expression in *Paradiso*. Properly speaking, language is unnecessary for communication in Paradise, and even impossible given its situation outside of time. The ‘command performance’<sup>253</sup> of the blessed on behalf of Dante-pilgrim and his readers permits the illogical presence of speech in *Paradiso*. Yet beyond sheer necessity Cacciaguida's exhortation to Dante-pilgrim, “‘suoni la volontà, suoni 'l disio’” (*Par.XV.68*),

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<sup>247</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. and trans. by Vittorio Coletti (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), p. 8 (book I, chapter 3).

<sup>248</sup> Marianne Shapiro, *De vulgari eloquentia: Dante's Book of Exile* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 49.

<sup>249</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, pars II-II, qu.91, art.2, (III, p. 531).

<sup>250</sup> ‘*ST*’, XI, p. 166.

<sup>251</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, pars II-II, qu.91, art.1 (III, p. 529).

<sup>252</sup> ‘*ST*’, XI, p. 164.

<sup>253</sup> The phrase is John Freccero's; see *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 179, 221, and 226.

reminds us of the power of vocalised language to inspire devotion in a manner akin to Aquinas's claims for spoken praise.

More generally, beyond the specific value of hymns or psalms in Purgatory, the force of liturgical language can be seen to lie in its performativity, following J.L. Austin's definition of the performative as at work in cases where 'the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action' and keeping in mind Aquinas's emphasis on the capacity of spoken and sung language to inspire inner devotion.<sup>254</sup> The importance of the performativity of liturgical language has been recognised explicitly since Jean Ladrière's proposal that the relevance and success of the liturgy lies in its power to bring about change through collective, linguistic repetition in an institutional context that enables 'présentification', rendering the Christian truth a present reality.<sup>255</sup> This success is, for Ladrière, reliant on a perfect balance of objectivity (liturgical language as 'un instrument d'expression et de communication de portée universelle') and subjectivity: 'En utilisant la première personne, le locuteur met en œuvre les règles constitutives du langage ; en un sens il se soumet à ces règles, mais en un autre sens il leur donne vie.'<sup>256</sup> It is notable that Ladrière shares with Sutherland this awareness of the importance of the first person in liturgical vocalisation.

As already intimated as regards the psalms, through liturgical language, the individual, as part of the community of believers, is able to enter into a productive dialogue with God.<sup>257</sup> Repentance and conversion happen through and in a language that must therefore

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<sup>254</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 6. See, in relation to Dante, Denys Turner, 'How to Do Things with Words: Poetry as Sacrament in Dante's *Commedia*', *Dante's 'Commedia': Theology as Poetry*, pp. 286-305.

<sup>255</sup> See Jean Ladrière, 'The Performativity of Liturgical Language', trans. by John Griffiths, *Concilium*, 9:2 (February, 1973), 50-62. In French, see Ladrière, *L'Articulation du sens*, 2 vols (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1984), II: *Les Langages de la foi*, pp. 55-65.

<sup>256</sup> Ladrière, *L'Articulation du sens*, II, p. 58.

<sup>257</sup> On liturgy as 'un dialogue entre Dieu et son peuple', see A. G. Martimort, *L'Église en prière: introduction à la liturgie* (Paris: Desclée & Cie, 1965), p. 117. The performativity of liturgical language is also implicit in

be described as performative. The individual performs his or her Christian identity through listening, reading, speaking, and singing in a social, institutional context; language here is not merely descriptive, but rather is constitutive or creative. It is vital to understand that, as regards Dante's *Purgatorio*, the souls' recitation of psalms, for instance, performs as central a role in the process of purgation as the allotted physical suffering, in a manner that perfectly matches Sutherland's analysis of the performativity of psalms in medieval culture referenced above. In *Purgatorio*, liturgical language is useful in that it produces a change, and is an important part of the process of transforming each repentant sinner into a forgiven, purified soul ready to enter Paradise. While Hell is the site of fixed, unchangeable, and unchanging essences, Purgatory is a place of becoming: 'quel secondo regno | dove l'umano spirito si purga | e di salire al ciel diventa degno' (*Purg.*1.4–6).

There is, then, a further, fundamental difference between language in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. I have already shown that language in *Inferno* is melancholic, that is, broken, self-centred, painful, and impeded, whereas in *Purgatorio* speech is recuperated and made whole through its collective, public, musical, and religious nature. It is also important to highlight the different roles repetition plays in the two realms. Language is repetitive in a pointless way in Hell, whereas in Purgatory linguistic repetition is performative and therefore necessary, useful, and purifying. In Hell, language is manifestly not performative or cathartic. Instead, the paradigm of infernal language is introduced by the narration of the soul's coming before Minos: 'quando l'anima mal nata | li vien dinanzi, tutta si confessa' (*Inf.*V.7–8). The confession is descriptive and pointless; the soul is already irrevocably

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Martimort's declaration that through liturgy 'on "fait" quelque chose' (p. 8): 'Toute liturgie est une *action* sacrée communautaire' (p. 207, my emphasis).

damned, and the confession cannot therefore lead to redemption or any positive change.<sup>258</sup> Similarly, the crucial words which should crown the powerful, performative act of confession, *ego te absolvo*, are mocked in Hell through the story of Boniface VIII's empty words ("finor t'assolvo", *Inf.XXVII.101*), which have no effect on the fate of Guido da Montefeltro.<sup>259</sup>

In contrast, in Purgatory, it is through repetition of set texts that 'la piaga', the wound of sin, 'si ricscia' (*Purg.XXV.139*). There is a great difference here between the wounds inflicted in Hell on the schismatics for instance, which heal over only to be reopened, and the progressive but definitive panacea afforded in Purgatory, through a collective and sacred use of language. For example, Dante-pilgrim asks Hugo Capeto "perché [...] | tu queste degne lode rinovelle" (*Purg.XX.35-6*), echoing by way of contrast the renewing of pain caused by Ugolino's speech, as already cited (*Inf.XXIII.4-5*). Hugo's explanation, beginning "Noi repetiam" (*Purg.XX.103*), reaffirms the utility and necessity of collective and repetitive speech in Purgatory. Moreover, as Barolini notes, the contrast between Ugolino's 'deadly repetition' and the true renewal on which Purgatory is based is confirmed in the last lines of the second *cantica*, when Dante-pilgrim is described as 'rifatto sì, come piante novelle | rinovellate di novella fronda, | puro e disposto a salire a le stelle' (*Purg.XXXIII.143-5*).<sup>260</sup>

It is helpful to use Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's distinction between two types of repetition to understand further the linguistic differences between the first two *cantiche*, bearing the divergent implications of the verb 'rinovellare' in mind. Rimmon-Kenan draws

<sup>258</sup> On the function of Minos as a parody of confession, see Matthew Senior, *In the Grip of Minos: Confessional Discourse in Dante, Corneille, and Racine* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), p. 58.

<sup>259</sup> See Ardissino, *Tempo liturgico e tempo storico*, p. 71.

<sup>260</sup> See Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 96.

a distinction between constructive and destructive repetition, noting that while ‘Constructive repetition emphasizes difference, destructive repetition emphasizes sameness’.<sup>261</sup> This parallel maps neatly onto Freud’s distinction between the pleasure principle and the death drive. Both, confusingly, are after all associated with repetition. Yet Rimmon-Kenan perceptively notes that destructive repetition (the death drive) involves passivity whereas constructive repetition (the pleasure principle) often enables a passing from a passive to an active, controlling role. The child playing *fort/da*, for instance, rather than suffering passively and helplessly at his mother’s disappearances, is arguably able to take control through ludic, constructive repetition of the scenario, which Freud praises as ‘the child’s great cultural achievement’ (*SE* XVIII:15).

As regards the *Commedia*, it is evident that infernal repetition, on the one hand, is destructive, since it produces ‘over-sameness’, ‘repeats itself without variation’, and the sinners are reduced to passive suffering and pointless repetition of trauma.<sup>262</sup> We need only recall Francesca’s self-presentation as a passive victim already in life, let alone in Hell, and the pain of her repeating her experience via memory and narrative for the sake of Dante-pilgrim. To borrow Freud’s description, the damned souls indicate that ‘no lesson has been learnt from the old experience of these activities having led instead only to unpleasure. In spite of that, they are repeated, under pressure of a compulsion’ (*SE* XVIII:21). In this respect, Lombardi has described the infernal souls’ speech as not only compulsive but even masochistic.<sup>263</sup> Purgatorial repetition, on the other hand, is constructive as it is an agent of progress and improvement, and results in change. In *Purgatorio*, the penitent souls are actively engaged in taking control of their desires, and can possibly use their own judgement

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<sup>261</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, ‘The Paradoxical Status of Repetition’, p. 153.

<sup>262</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, ‘The Paradoxical Status of Repetition’, p. 154.

<sup>263</sup> Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves*, p. 93, and ‘Plurilingualism *sub specie aeternitatis* and the Strategies of a Minority Author’.

to realise, in line with divine wishes, when they are ready to finish their process of purgation (*Purg.*XXI.58-63).<sup>264</sup> Dante's Hell is thus governed by a painful 'compulsion to repeat',<sup>265</sup> as Peter Hawkins suggests,<sup>266</sup> whereas Purgatory is structured around a productive and pleasurable choice or will to repeat, which we might consider analogous to the productive work of repetition undertaken in psychoanalysis.<sup>267</sup> While repetition in Hell is circular, compulsive, endless, and fruitless, in Purgatory it follows a linear trajectory, has a definite endpoint, and is an important part of the self-willed process of purgation in which the souls are participating. This bipartite characterisation of repetition can, finally, be mapped onto a contrast between infernal melancholia (repetitive, compulsive, endless, circular) and a purgatorial work of mourning (linear, finite, productive). It is to this latter subject that the remainder of this chapter is devoted.

### *Purgatory and the work of mourning*

Nolumus autem vos ignorare fratres de dormientibus ut non contristemini sicut et ceteri qui spem non habent.

*And we will not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that you be not sorrowful, even as others who have no hope.*

I Thessalonians 4:12/13

In contrast to the circular, obsessive iteration of sin in *Inferno*, which I have identified with the inactivity (or pointless activity), inhibition, and repetition of melancholia and the death drive, *Purgatorio* reintroduces linearity and progress and, through productive activity, allows

<sup>264</sup> On these lines, see Kenelm Foster, 'Dante's Idea of Purgatory, with Special Reference to *Purgatorio* XXI, 58-66', in *Dies illa: Death in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 1983 Manchester Colloquium*, ed. by Jane H.M. Taylor (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1984), pp. 97-105.

<sup>265</sup> *SE* XVIII:19. See also, for the first appearance of the term, Freud's 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through', *SE* XII:145-56.

<sup>266</sup> Hawkins speaks of Hell as 'repetition-compulsion', *Dante: A Brief History*, p. 51.

<sup>267</sup> See Annie Anzieu, 'L'Heure de la répétition', *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse*, 15 (1977), 163-75.

the work of mourning according to Dante to be accomplished.<sup>268</sup> Jeremy Tambling's observation that on the terrace of sloth, 'mourning corrects melancholia',<sup>269</sup> might be applied more generally to all the terraces of the mountain of Purgatory. Like Freud's work of mourning which is a slow process, 'carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy' (*SE* XIV:245), the path through Purgatory is a gradual one, as the purging of each sin in turn is signalled by the guardian angel of each terrace wiping each 'P' one by one from the forehead of the penitent. Unlike the endless repetition of infernal eternity, purgatorial time allows each soul to change and progress, in a process that has a definite start and end point, from the soul's death and passage to the foot of the mountain to the soul's gradual purification and liberation from sin that is celebrated by reaching the Earthly Paradise at the mountain's summit. While infernal melancholia is a static, unchanging state, the purgatorial work of mourning relies upon and ensures productive progression. Dante's *Purgatorio* provides the space and time necessary for the dead, penitential souls to bring their mourning of earthly things to an end and turn to God. Besides, for those still living, Purgatory's encouragement to prayer and good deeds on behalf of the deceased offers a form of continued connection with those who have died and a way therefore for the living to carry out their own work of mourning in a context of faith and hope.<sup>270</sup>

In this interpretation of *Purgatorio* I seek to explore and develop the consequences of Hawkins's suggestion that 'the whole experience of the Mountain of Purgatory can be likened to a psychoanalysis, where the analysand painfully unties the knots of the past so as

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<sup>268</sup> See Henry Staten, *Eros in Mourning*, p. 75, for the suggestion, albeit undeveloped, that 'The Dantean ascent is a form of the work of mourning'.

<sup>269</sup> Tambling, *Dante in Purgatory*, p. 153, and 'Dreaming the Siren: Dante and Melancholy', p. 61.

<sup>270</sup> See, for instance, Michel Vovelle, *Les Âmes du purgatoire ou le travail du deuil* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), pp. 112-13, and on prayer in *Purgatorio* more generally: Giovanni Fallani, *Poesia e teologia nella 'Divina Commedia'*, 3 vols (Milan: Marzorati, 1959-65), II (1961), pp. 15-28; Aldo Vallone, *Studi su Dante medievale* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1965), pp. 83-109.

to live more freely in an unencumbered future'.<sup>271</sup> Indeed, as Hawkins senses, the central lesson of Purgatory, that each soul must learn to turn from earthly desires to God, has interesting analogies in Freudian language with the need for the ego to decaject its libido from any past, lost love object and reinvest it in a new love object. In Virgil's words, the purgatorial souls are "Ombre che vanno | forse di lor dover solvendo il nodo" (*Purg.*XXIII.14-15), where the past attachment is figured as a knot that needs to be untied. The process is analogous to the decathexis of the slow and painful work of mourning described by Freud, which involves detaching oneself from the source of grief and attaching oneself to a new love. However, there is a crucial difference between the new object of Freudian and of purgatorial mourning. Unlike Freud's replacement object, which is essentially interchangeable – hence its ability to act as a substitute for the lost object – and in all likelihood itself destined in turn to be lost and superseded, the work of mourning in Dante's middle realm is only successful in so much as it designates God as the ultimate, irreplaceable love object and the only source of true, lasting satisfaction for the individual. For Dante, Freud's reality principle (that is, the realigning of one's expectations with reality making possible an end of mourning) might more properly be termed the 'God principle', since it manifests itself as the gradual process of concordance of each soul's desires with the divine order of a higher reality.

Dante's Purgatory thus signals the end of mourning in a more dramatic and final way than the Freudian model. Whereas the latter allows for the work of mourning to be repeated every time a love object is lost, leaving in the ego's wake a trail of successive loves, the former is proposing a way out of this sequence of losses by libidinal investment in that which, having reached this far and avoided consignment to *Inferno*, will never be lost,

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<sup>271</sup> Hawkins, *Dante: A Brief History*, pp. 50-1. See also Hawkins, 'The Religion of the Mountain: Handling Sin in Dante's *Purgatorio*', in *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, pp. 223-38 (p. 234).

namely God. Freud and Dante both place freedom as the reward at the end of the work of mourning, the first declaring that ‘when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again’ (*SE* XIV:245) and the second having Virgil proclaim to Dante-pilgrim at the end of his purgatorial ascent “‘libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio’” (*Purg.*XXVII.140). Yet whereas in Freud this is, as well as the regained ability to form any sort of libidinal attachment, the freedom to fall in love with another substitute object as mortal and unreliable as the previous lost object which provoked the work of mourning in the first place, in Dante this is freedom from such earthly ties and the ability to enter the Earthly Paradise and then Heaven with the soul’s sights set unequivocally on God.

From the beginning of *Purgatorio*, the middle realm is marked as the place where the end of mourning is accomplished. As Cato’s response to Virgil indicates, there is a new law in force in Purgatory which means that souls here do not mourn for absent friends. Of his wife Marcia, consigned to Limbo, Cato says “‘più muover non mi può’” (*Purg.*I.89). Dante-pilgrim’s reunion with his friend Belacqua in ante-Purgatory also signals an end to his mourning; as he says, “‘Belacqua, a me non dole | di te omai’” (*Purg.*IV.123–4). The implications of these two examples are stark: those in Hell do not deserve to be mourned, and those in Purgatory destined for Paradise do not need to be mourned. This eschatological scheme is, however, complicated both by the position of the still living Dante-pilgrim within the poem, and by the events and laws of *Paradiso*. While *Purgatorio* involves a complex process of detachment from earthly ties, the end result problematises the very process itself, as in *Paradiso* reunion with one’s loved ones is envisaged in a space of desire

beyond mourning and melancholia.<sup>272</sup> It is therefore to a consideration of Dante-pilgrim's involvement in *Purgatorio* that I now turn.

Within this general overview of the mechanisms underpinning the functioning of Purgatory, the role Dante-pilgrim plays particularly at the top of the mountain is able both to confirm and challenge several key elements of the purgatorial process. Throughout his journey up the mountain, Dante-pilgrim has participated in the souls' physical suffering where possible and to a greater or lesser extent depending on the sin. This is most notable on the first terrace, that of pride, a sin to which Dante-pilgrim confesses to feel particularly vulnerable (*Purg.*XIII.136-8); here, Dante-pilgrim finds himself bending over (*Purg.*XII.1-9) to mirror the bowed heads and backs of the proud weighed down by stones and forced to contemplate the carvings on the pavement and side of the pathway. He also watches and listens like the other souls, sharing for instance in the ecstatic visions of the angry (*Purgatorio* XV). What he does not do is speak or sing according to the choral rules of the mountain. He does not join in the souls' singing of hymns or psalms, and he does not participate in any of the specifically spoken or sung techniques of purgation except as a listener. This is perhaps not surprising since, as I have noted, the laity would not have been expected or allowed to sing or speak in church. Besides, given that at this point Dante-pilgrim is still alive he is perhaps not yet worthy to join fully in all the activities of the purgatorial souls-turned-monks and -nuns.

Yet by mourning Virgil's departure at the end of *Purgatorio* Dante-pilgrim would seem to go against the stoical example set by Cato. This transgression is emphasised in the text by the implicit references to Cato's injunctions at the point when Dante-pilgrim describes his shock at Virgil's sudden absence:

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<sup>272</sup> Of course, this makes the 'disio' of the blessed souls for the 'corpi morti' (*Par.*XIV.63) of their friends and family all the more surprising and worthy of note, as Gagnolati explores in 'Nostalgia in Heaven'.

Ma Virgilio n'avea lasciati scemi  
di sé, Virgilio dolcissimo patre,  
Virgilio a cui per mia salute die'mi;  
né quantunque perdeo l'antica matre,  
valse a le guance nette di rugiada  
che, lagrimando, non tornasser atre. (Purg.XXX.49-54)

There is a clear reference here to Dante-pilgrim's ritual washing of his face, following Cato's command in *Purgatorio* I.<sup>273</sup> The allusion highlights Dante-pilgrim's disobedience of Cato's rules; not only does he stain his cleansed face with tears again, but his mourning for Virgil more fundamentally goes against Cato's detached, emotionless attitude towards his former wife, who, significantly, dwells in the same part of Hell as Virgil, Limbo.

Beatrice's first words to Dante in *Purgatorio* interrupt his silent, tearful grieving with a rebuke that seems to reinforce Cato's model of relinquishment and the wiping away of one's tears: "Dante, perché Virgilio se ne vada, | non pianger anco, non piangere ancora; | ché pianger ti conven per altra spada" (Purg.XXX.55-7). Beatrice does not exactly tell Dante-pilgrim not to mourn Virgil's disappearance, but rather instructs him that he should not give way to grief just yet, as he should save his tears for more pressing matters, that is, his own past sins. Yet nowhere in the poem do we find Dante-pilgrim able to give free rein to his tears for the loss of Virgil; Dante-pilgrim's repressed mourning of Virgil is one of the unresolved problems of the *Commedia*. This prevented mourning returns to haunt the journey through *Paradiso* in the sphere of Jupiter, where Dante-pilgrim enquires in a veiled fashion as to the possibility of pagan salvation and is told to constrain his knowledge within human bounds (*Paradiso* XIX). Even in the Heaven of justice, there is no answer.

The encounter with Beatrice is also the site of the testing and purifying of Dante-pilgrim's voice, after his role as listener throughout the liturgy of Purgatory (excepting, of

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<sup>273</sup> Cato's advice is *Purg.*I.94-9, while the words 'rugiada' and 'guance' which textually recall the carrying out of this action at this point appear *Purg.*I.121 and 127.

course, his friendly conversations with souls throughout the mountain). In the Earthly Paradise at the top of Purgatory, as Francesca Southerden has persuasively shown, Dante-pilgrim is forced by Beatrice to confess his sins and so move beyond melancholic language in preparation for ascending to Paradise where new, purer, more elevated forms of language and subjectivity will be required.<sup>274</sup> Beatrice commands, ““dì, dì se questo è vero; a tanta accusa | tua confession conviene esser congiunta”” (*Purg.*XXXI.5-6), and after a lengthy period of hesitation, Dante-pilgrim breaks free of this state of being entrapped in melancholic, impeded, broken language, to answer first with an inaudible ““sì”” (v. 14) and then with a full, if still brief, confession (vv. 34-6). Dante-pilgrim is able to move beyond the melancholic language reminiscent of sinners in *Inferno* and which is accompanied by tears and sighs (‘fuori sgorgando lagrime e sospiri’, ‘[p]iangendo dissi’, *Purg.*XXXI.20 and 34). He is also able to move beyond his own personal mourning for Beatrice, the pattern of which I discuss later in relation to the *Vita nuova* (in the Epilogue).

In the Garden of Eden, Beatrice explicitly acts as Dante-pilgrim’s confessor, and Dante-pilgrim is significantly the only individual in the *Commedia* to participate in the sacrament of confession, as indeed in any sacrament in the poem. As Peter Armour has stressed, in his research which seems rightly to contradict the frequent reading – albeit in a symbolic vein – of the three steps up to the door of Purgatory as the three stages of confession, the souls in the Afterlife have no need for the sacraments, as it would be too late for the sacraments to do any good.<sup>275</sup> It is only because Dante-pilgrim is still living and will return to Earth at the end of his journey, that his confession is possible and effective. At the top of the mountain of Purgatory, then, Dante-pilgrim finally engages in a form of speech

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<sup>274</sup> Francesca Southerden, ‘Lost for Words: Recuperating Melancholy Subjectivity in Dante’s Eden’, in *Dante’s Plurilingualism*, pp. 193-210.

<sup>275</sup> Peter Armour, *The Door of Purgatory: A Study of Multiple Symbolism in Dante’s ‘Purgatorio’* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

therapy which, however, remains unique to him as a still living individual. His cathartic and purifying words relate to his personal past in striking contrast to the collective, liturgical language of the singing purgatorial souls, although, as Bortolo Martinelli has shown, the whole episode is replete with psalms,<sup>276</sup> which I would argue integrate Dante-pilgrim's monologic speech into the necessarily communal, liturgical context of Purgatory. Moreover, Senior's discussion, following Foucault, of Freudian psychoanalysis as having developed out of a long history of confession supports an interpretation of Dante-pilgrim's encounter with Beatrice at the top of Purgatory as a form of psycho-linguistic therapy.<sup>277</sup> In this respect Beatrice can be considered not only as a confessor but as a psychoanalyst in the Earthly Paradise, listening to Dante-pilgrim's disjointed speech and interpreting correctly his plight.

Beatrice goes on to rebuke Dante-pilgrim for his reaction to her own death:

‘Mai non t’appresentò natura o arte  
piacer, quanto le belle membra in ch’io  
rinchiusa fui, e che so’ ’n terra sparte;  
e se ’l sommo piacer sì ti fallio  
per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale  
dovea poi trarre te nel suo disio?  
Ben ti dovevi, per lo primo strale  
de le cose fallaci, levar suso  
di retro a me che non era più tale.  
Non ti dovea gravar le penne in giuso,  
ad aspettar più colpo, o pargoletta  
o altra novità con sì breve uso.’ (Purg.XXXI.49-60)

It is in this passage that the difference between the Dantean and Freudian work of mourning becomes clear. Beatrice indicts Dante-pilgrim's past transgressions, which include his dalliance with the ‘donna gentile’ after Beatrice's death narrated in the *Vita nuova*, as well as the ‘pargoletta’ of the *Rime*, and reproaches Dante-pilgrim for foolishly seeking equally mortal replacements after her death. The listed alternatives – “o pargoletta | o altra

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<sup>276</sup> See Martinelli *L'altro viaggio* (Pisa: Giardini Editori, 2007), pp. 213-57.

<sup>277</sup> See Senior, *In the Grip of Minos*, pp. 1-25, and also Chloë Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault*.

novità” – are dismissive in their lack of precision and their interchangeability, and criticised for their finitude, their “breve uso”. In Freudian terms the episode of the ‘donna gentile’ in the *Vita nuova* would seem to signal an appropriate end to mourning, with the establishing of a substitution for the lost object, not without a certain amount of time and pain. From such a perspective, each psychological ‘battaglia’ described between the old and new love, Beatrice and the ‘donna gentile’ in *VN* XXXVII and XXXVIII, resembles Freud’s reality-testing which, having ‘shown that the loved object no longer exists, [...] proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object’, not without arousing ‘understandable opposition’ (*SE* XIV:244). Yet, as the indefatigable resurgence of Beatrice at the end of the ‘libello’ suggests even before the *Commedia* (*VN* XXXIX), Dante seeks a way out of this repetitive succession of love and loss by placing Beatrice’s immortal soul as an arrow pointing upward, “suso”, to Heaven, the marker of an irreplaceable love preserved and immortalised in Paradise.

Of course, Beatrice herself will leave Dante in *Paradiso*, in an echo of Virgil’s disappearance at the top of the mountain of Purgatory. However, Dante-pilgrim’s differing reaction to the two events is telling. In contrast to his mournful tears at Virgil’s departure, Dante-pilgrim is curiously impassive when he discovers that Beatrice is no longer at his side. Beatrice’s leave-taking of Dante-pilgrim in *Paradiso* XXXI is figured as a distancing (she is ‘lontana’, v. 91) which cannot be a loss and as such does not cause the pilgrim to lapse back into either mourning or melancholia.<sup>278</sup> Dante-pilgrim does not participate in the work of mourning enabled by liturgical speech and song up the mountain of Purgatorio, and is unprepared to respond appropriately to Virgil’s irrevocable departure. By the time Beatrice

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<sup>278</sup> Peter S. Hawkins rightly compares the two partings, and notes that ‘None of the sorrow that marked the disappearance of Virgil in *Purgatorio* 30 occurs in *Paradiso* 31. This is because Beatrice has not truly left the pilgrim but only resumed her place in the heavenly rose.’ *Dante: A Brief History*, p. 69.

bids him farewell once more at the end of *Paradiso*, Dante-pilgrim has, however, gone through the confessional learning process of *Purgatorio* XXXI and the doctrinal rigours of *Paradiso*, and is, in any case, assured of eventual reunion with Beatrice in ““quella Roma onde Cristo è romano”” (*Purg.*XXXII.102). Dante-pilgrim witnesses the decisive passage from infernal melancholia to a collective purgatorial work of mourning recorded and constructed by Dante-poet, but his own journey in the *Commedia* is in the end more complex and more personal.

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Beatrice’s speech in *Purgatorio* XXXI brings to the fore questions of mourning and bodily mortality that are taken up by another Florentine poet in the fourteenth century: Petrarch. It is to this writer that the next chapter turns, with a focus on the *Canzoniere* and the *Secretum* which enables the delineation of an alternative narrative of mourning to the Dantean model elaborated in the *Commedia*. Chapter One has established a contrast between infernal melancholia and purgatorial mourning, which is reflected on a linguistic level between broken speech and a liturgical ‘singing cure’. Chapter Two, in contrast, seeks to elucidate Petrarch’s assumption of melancholic language that is often explicitly infernal (what I term ‘Petrarch’s melancholic rewriting of Dante’), but which challenges the purely negative moral connotations of such poetry. Kristeva’s *Soleil noir*, already juxtaposed to Dantean *acedia*, is the main theoretical angle of the chapter on Petrarch, and the paradoxical nature of Kristevan melancholia – at once threatening and creative – is fully acknowledged. Petrarch is found to provide a new perspective on the question of the relationship between *acedia* and melancholia, since both experiences are central to his poetry, and this relationship is very different to that discernible in Dante’s *Inferno*.



# AIEEEEEEEJD

## Chapter Two. Petrarch's Fraught Poetics of Melancholia

No, scrivendo non mi sono cambiata in bene: ho solo consumato un po' d'ansiosa incosciente giovinezza. Che mi varranno queste pagine scontente? Il libro, il voto, non varrà più di quanto tu vali. Che ci si salvi l'anima scrivendo non è detto. Scrivi, scrivi, e già la tua anima è persa.<sup>279</sup>

In Chapter One, I explored how Dante's *Commedia* enacts an irreversible journey from infernal melancholia to purgatorial mourning and beyond. In this chapter, as a counterbalance and challenge to the Dantean model, I now consider forms of grief in Petrarch which seem to revert to and recontextualise the endless melancholia of *Inferno*. In this section my theoretical focus is once again Kristeva's *Soleil noir*, which I have already introduced in relation to Dante's melancholic infernal language. In the previous chapter, I drew certain conclusions about the characteristics of Kristevan melancholic language, namely, its being typically broken, stuttering, interrupted, and impeded. I saw these characteristics as illuminating and relevant for Dante's portrayal of the speech of infernal sinners, and in particular the *accidiosi*, who thereby seemed to emblematised the difficult linguistic situation of many of the characters consigned to *Inferno*. Here, however, such an admittedly one-sided view of Kristevan melancholia must be

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<sup>279</sup> Italo Calvino, *Il cavaliere inesistente*, in *Romanzi e racconti*, ed. by Claudio Milanini, 3 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1991-94), I, pp. 953-1064 (p. 1009).

expanded to encompass its sunnier counterpart, melancholic language that is to be considered a source of inspiration and creativity.

For Kristeva, it is of paramount importance that melancholic language is not only or necessarily futile or painful (in my terms, infernal). Instead, a certain form of melancholia can be creative. In her words, ‘une diversification des humeurs, une tristesse en palette, un raffinement dans le chagrin ou le deuil, sont la marque d’une humanité certes non pas triomphante, mais subtile, combative et créatrice’ (SN, p. 32). Crucially, Kristeva does not claim that literature should seek to be able to cure or triumph over melancholia; the writing of fiction is more subtly resistant and vibrant in that it signifies ‘sinon un antidépresseur, du moins une survie, une résurrection’ (SN, p. 62). Kristeva encourages a multi-faceted division of melancholia into subcategories in a manner that can help to justify the bipolar, separatist approach I am using in characterising on the one hand, the painful, impeded language of the sinners in Dante’s *Inferno*, and on the other, the painful but unceasingly rich and creative language of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*. In an interview shortly after the publication of *Soleil noir*, when prompted ‘Peut-être faudrait-il expliquer succinctement ce que l’on entend aujourd’hui par mélancolie’, Kristeva’s reply divided melancholia into certain distinct types:

Effectivement, le terme recouvre des réalités fort différentes. Disons, et pardonnez-moi si je vais un peu vite, on peut distinguer trois significations attachées au mot « mélancolie ». D’une part, pour la psychiatrie c’est une affection grave qui se manifeste par un ralentissement psychique, idéatoire et moteur, par une extinction du goût pour la vie, du désir de la parole, par l’arrêt de toute activité et par l’attrait irrésistible du suicide. Par ailleurs, il existe une forme plus légère de cet abattement qui (comme la première d’ailleurs) alterne souvent avec des états d’excitation, forme dépendante d’états névrotiques et qu’on appelle une dépression. Les psychanalystes ont le plus souvent affaire à la dépression. Enfin, pour le sens commun, pour une opinion diffuse, serait mélancolie un « vague à l’âme », un « spleen », une nostalgie, dont on recueille les échos dans l’art et la littérature et qui, tout en étant un malaise, revêt l’aspect

souvent sublime d'une beauté. Je rappelle dans mon livre que le beau est né dans le pays de la mélancolie, qu'il est une harmonie par delà le désespoir.<sup>280</sup>

The first form might be imagined as analogous to my infernal model and the third closer to Petrarch's vision, even if such an equation is not watertight. It is clear, for instance, that certain aspects of *Inferno* such as the figure of Francesca can also be considered beautiful or sublime, particularly in Petrarch's interpretation, as I will explore. In respect of Petrarch, what is so intriguing about his poetics is in part its paradoxical combination of two of the seemingly irreconcilable aspects of Kristevan melancholia, linguistic inhibition and creativity. Moreover, it is true that in *Soleil noir*, not to mention in this interview, all three types of melancholia tend to be almost seamlessly elided, so that Kristeva notes from the outset that 'Les deux termes de mélancolie et de dépression désignent un ensemble qu'on pourrait nommer mélancolico-dépressif dont les confins sont en réalité flous' (SN, p. 19).

Appropriately, an initial point of consonance between Kristeva and Petrarch is this very postulating of variety and difference within melancholia, however difficult this may be to define. As I have already noted in the Introduction, evidence for such melancholic diversity is to be found in Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortune*, a series of dialogues on different topics between 'Ratio' (Reason), on the one hand, and, on the other, 'Dolor' (Sorrow), 'Gaudium' (Joy), 'Spes sive Cupiditas' (Hope or Desire), and 'Metus' (Fear). In a section concerning the motivations for writing, 'Ratio' (Reason) comments:

Melancholie species infinitas ferunt: alii lapides iactant, alii libros scribunt; huic scribere furoris initium est, huic exitus.

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<sup>280</sup> Julia Kristeva and Dominique Grisoni, 'Les Abîmes de l'âme', *Magazine littéraire*, 244 (July–August 1987), 16–18 (p. 16). This issue is dedicated to the topic of 'Littérature et mélancolie'. The interview is translated by Ross Guberman as 'Melancholia and Creation' in *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, ed. by Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 78–84.

*One hears of innumerable types of melancholy. Some throw stones, others write books. For one, writing is the beginning of madness; for another, it is the end.*<sup>281</sup>

To this 'Gaudium' (Joy) replies, ambiguously, 'Scripsi multa et scribo', '*I have written much and am still writing*'. This exchange is, of course, highly relevant for Petrarch's own unending literary project, as epitomised for instance in his ceaseless revisions to the *Canzoniere* right up to his death, not to mention his other ambitious literary projects and his prolific letter-writing. As this chapter explores, while a certain kind of melancholia may function as an 'initium' or catalyst for writing, there is in certain cases no escape from or definite end to either this melancholia or the act itself of writing. In this respect, for a certain type of melancholia, both Petrarch and Kristeva argue that writing does something beneficial and effective other than provide a cure or bring melancholia to an end (an 'exitus'), as in Dante's version. What this alternative might be will become clearer in due course.

In *Soleil noir*, Kristeva offers several explanations for the paradox under discussion that melancholia can be both inhibiting and inspirational. One such explanation of melancholia's creative force is that it is inspired by the melancholic's insight and intermittent manic tendencies; 'la chaîne des représentations linguistiques peut revêtir chez le déprimé une grande originalité associative', when bouts of mania result in a 'hyperactivité signifiante' that complements the melancholic's 'hyperlucidité cognitive' (SN, pp. 69-70). A further explanation is that the melancholic loss of faith in language, which is perceived in melancholia as arbitrary and meaningless, can paradoxically lead to the necessity of seeking a new language which seems more necessary and potent the more personal and unlike ordinary language use it is. The risk,

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<sup>281</sup> *Les remèdes aux deux fortunes/De remediis utriusque fortune*, I, p. 228; *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, I, p. 145.

of course, is that this unique translation into words of one's personal experience may collapse into silence:

La traduction [...] cherche à se rendre étrangère à elle-même pour trouver, dans la langue maternelle, un « *mot total, neuf, étranger à la langue* » (Mallarmé), afin de capter l'innommable. Le surplus d'affect n'a donc pas d'autre moyen pour se manifester que de produire de nouveaux langages – des enchaînements étranges, des idiolectes, des poétiques. Jusqu'à ce que le poids de la Chose originale l'emporte, et que toute traductibilité devienne impossible. La mélancolie s'achève alors dans l'asymbolie, la perte de sens. (*SN*, p. 54)

Besides the explicit Mallarmean reference, Kristeva also no doubt has in mind Proust's declaration that 'Les beaux livres sont écrits dans une sorte de langue étrangère',<sup>282</sup> to which she adds here a melancholic gloss, where strangeness or foreignness is a sign of both alienation and innovation.

Comparable to Kristeva's theorisation of varieties of melancholia that range from linguistic invention to linguistic collapse is Petrarch's similarly paradoxical postulation of an experience of grief that both encourages eloquence and imposes silence:

Etsi sepe brevilocus dolor nonnunquam etiam mutus sit, ubi gravi obice vocis iter obstruit meste torpideque mentis anxietas; ubi tamen congelati meroris obstaculum lesi animi calore resolvitur, verba iter inveniunt et sepe loquacissimus dolor est. Utriusque rei argumentum ego sum, qui diu nimio tacitus dolore, nunc ut vides sermone multiplici triste hoc et pregravatum pectus exhonero.<sup>283</sup>

*Although grief is often terse, sometimes too it is mute when the anguish of a sad and sluggish mind has blocked the voice's passageway with a heavy bolt. When this obstacle of frozen sorrow is dissolved, however, in the warmth of a wounded spirit, words find the way and often grief becomes quite eloquent. I am an example of either sort of behaviour. I was long silent because of my excessive grief; now, as you see, I am relieving my sad and heavy heart with lengthy discourse.*<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> CSB, p. 305 (from '[Notes sur la littérature et la critique]', pp. 303–12). The line from Mallarmé comes from 'Crise de vers', *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Bertrand Marchal, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1998–2003), II, pp. 204–13 (p. 213).

<sup>283</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Familiarium rerum libri/Le Familiari*, ed. by Vittorio Rossi, 4 vols (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1933–42), II (1934), p. 223 (book 9, letter 5). See, though, for a summary of instances in Petrarch's letters of a more critical, Stoical attitude towards public grief and mourning, Carol Lansing, *Passion and Order: Restraint of Grief in the Medieval Italian Communes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

<sup>284</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters: Books 9–16*, trans. by Aldo S. Bernardo (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 13 (book IX, letter 5, to Ugolino, Bishop of Parma).

This passage provides an interesting gloss on the *Canzoniere*, where, as we shall see, the intensity and unrelentingness of Petrarchan melancholia is conveyed through both the breakdown of speech and line after line of moving poetry.

In this chapter, having introduced how Petrarch's 'malinconia' sits within nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interpretations of the concept, I proceed by examining how Kristeva's notion of a melancholic language that is necessarily and impossibly at once near-silent and impressively eloquent can be found to be particularly resonant in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.<sup>285</sup> Subsequently, I attempt to hone my definition of Petrarchan melancholia by situating concretely – that is, from a predominantly intertextual angle – Petrarch's representation of grief in relation to his predecessor, Dante. It is in this context that I introduce the *Vita nuova* into the discussion, although this text does not truly take the limelight until the Epilogue, where it is used as a destabilising, complex resting point for the thesis. As with Petrarch's relationship with the *Commedia* – a relationship of resistance, rewriting, and disagreement – so Petrarch's relationship with the *Vita nuova* is suggested to consist in far from a simple matter of emulation. Thirdly, I reconsider in the light of Petrarch's writings the definitions and consequences of *acedia* that I elaborated in relation to the *Commedia* in Chapter One, in an attempt to differentiate further melancholia from the sin with which it has been found to share many characteristics. *Acedia* is an explicit concern of the *Secretum*, which in large part takes the form of an examination of conscience guided by the traditional theological classifications of sin. It is also, however, as I examine, a crucial if much more implicit concern of the *Canzoniere*. In this manner, I move towards a

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<sup>285</sup> Hints of the fruitfulness of a Kristevan reading of Petrarch can be found in Marion A. Wells, *The Secret Wound: Love-Melancholy and Early Modern Romance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 86-95, although no mention of fragmentation or repetition, the aspects I find most strikingly to be in common.

Kristevan-enhanced definition of Petrarchan melancholia that is seen to draw on Dante's *Inferno* and reject the un-melancholic solutions of the *Vita nuova* and *Purgatorio* respectively.

### *Melancholy and melancholia in Petrarch*

I begin, first and foremost, by outlining the principal features of Petrarch's melancholia, drawing on the work of earlier critics whilst also illuminating my analysis with the aid of more recent theoretical and psychoanalytical developments. Petrarch has frequently been identified by critics as melancholy or melancholic in a pre-Freudian sense. While an attempt has been made to situate Petrarch's *Canzoniere* within a medieval medical discourse of 'malinconia',<sup>286</sup> the identification of Petrarchan melancholy is most often the province of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics influenced by the preoccupations of their own time and more modern understandings of the term. As I highlight, both Francesco De Sanctis and Arturo Farinelli speak of Petrarch's 'malinconia', a term which for them encapsulates the despair, suffering, and nostalgia of the poetic voice of the *Canzoniere*. Nineteenth-century melancholy – I reserve the term melancholia for a specifically Freudian and post-Freudian usage of the word – of course owes much to Baudelairean spleen or Leopardian *noia* or *ennui*, but it shares certain aspects with its twentieth-century psychoanalytical successor, particularly in its emphasis on despair and loss.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> See Natascia Tonelli, 'Malinconia, frenesia e presentimento nei *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*', in *Petrarca e la medicina: Atti del Convegno di Capo d'Orlando 27-28 giugno 2003*, ed. by Monica Berté, Vincenzo Fera, and Tiziana Pesenti (Messina: Centro interdipartimentale di studi umanistici, 2006), pp. 105-22.

<sup>287</sup> See Reinhard Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

De Sanctis was perhaps the first to discuss Petrarch's 'malinconia' at any length. In his *Saggio*, based on lectures he gave in 1858, De Sanctis declares that Petrarch 'è consumato da una insanabile melanconia', which he defines as 'un dolore concentrato, di cui non sa assegnar la causa, una desolazione muta, senza sfogo', resulting in 'un lamento inesausto'.<sup>288</sup> Here De Sanctis seems to come close to describing the unconsciousness of loss which Freud will associate with melancholia (*SE* XIV:247). Moreover, De Sanctis clearly deems melancholia incurable and endless, a view shared by psychoanalysis and supportable by such lines from Petrarch as 'son fatto albergo d'infinita doglia' (301.11), where the poet's passivity is also manifest. For De Sanctis, Petrarchan melancholia is what one might call a cloud with a silver lining, as is typical of the humanist tradition of the melancholic artist from Marsilio Ficino onwards.<sup>289</sup> That is, while the cause of suffering, it is also a source of inspiration and heightened sensibility, to be conveyed in elegant rather than harsh language. Petrarchan melancholia is, to quote De Sanctis once more, a 'dolore [...] elegiaco' and 'fecondo', with 'una melodia, una grazia, una misura, una chiarezza semplice ed elegante, senza esempio in tutto il Medio evo'.<sup>290</sup> Following explicitly De Sanctis's lead, Farinelli also discusses Petrarch's 'malinconia' as both 'insanabile' and 'dolce', and as resulting in 'un gemere, un sospirare continuo'.<sup>291</sup> For Benedetto Croce, the poet's 'disperazione e la malinconia che a ciò segue o s'accompagna' are some of the defining features supporting the frequent claim

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<sup>288</sup> Francesco De Sanctis, *Saggio critico sul Petrarca*, ed. by Ettore Bonora (Milan: Marzorati, 1971), pp. 159-80 (pp. 162, 163, 191).

<sup>289</sup> See *The Nature of Melancholy*, ed. by Radden, pp. 87-94.

<sup>290</sup> De Sanctis, *Saggio critico sul Petrarca*, pp. 183, 189, 227.

<sup>291</sup> Arturo Farinelli, 'La malinconia del Petrarca', *Rivista d'Italia: Lettere, scienze ed arte*, 5:2 (July 1902), 5-39 (pp. 7, 12, 39).

that Petrarch is the “‘Primo poeta moderno’”.<sup>292</sup> More recently, Umberto Bosco has continued this analysis of Petrarchan melancholia, particularly in terms of its contradictoriness and circularity:

Elegia e non dramma, giacché, se un dolore implica la vittoria di una convinzione, d'un sentimento su tutti gli altri, il fluttuare delle convinzioni e dei sentimenti non può dare che malinconia, cioè uno scontento lievitante, non conscio esattamente delle sue ragioni: l'unico ambiente nel quale possono vivere contraddittorie aspirazioni, senza che l'una cancelli l'altra. Il dolore è rettilineo, la malinconia circolare. Nel Petrarca, è chiaro, non ci può essere che quest'ultima.<sup>293</sup>

The labyrinth is a suitable image of melancholia's endless and inescapable circuitousness identified by Bosco, as one commemoration of the poet's *innamoramento* suggests: 'Mille trecento ventisette, a punto | su l'ora prima, il dì sesto d'aprile, | nel laberinto intrai, né veggio ond'esca' (211.12-14). By closing the sonnet with this line, Petrarch turns the poem into a claustrophobic, self-enclosed space in which the reader remains trapped, mirroring the poet's own imprisonment. Thomas Greene is justified in asserting that 'a labyrinth without thread, without Ariadne or Daedalus' is precisely 'what might be called the Petrarchan condition'.<sup>294</sup> Also illuminating is Jean Starobinski's definition of the labyrinth, albeit not in reference to Petrarch, as a peculiarly melancholic space because of its combination of both movement and immobility: 'Une prison où l'on erre, une réclusion vagabonde : c'est le labyrinthe.'<sup>295</sup> Similar observations of the contiguity of restlessness and stasis are frequent in the *Canzoniere*: 'l'aura mi volve, et son pur quel ch'i' m'era' (112.4); 'io son pur quel ch'i' mi soglio, |

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<sup>292</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Poesia popolare e poesia d'arte: Studi sulla poesia italiana dal tre al cinquecento*, 3rd edn (Bari: Laterza & figli, 1952), p. 71. As noted in the Introduction, this is not a claim I wish necessarily to endorse, and this chapter's later discussion of *acedia* seeks to remind readers of Petrarch's medieval roots.

<sup>293</sup> Umberto Bosco, *Francesco Petrarca* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1961), p. 93.

<sup>294</sup> Thomas M. Greene, *The Vulnerable Text: Essays on Renaissance Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 35.

<sup>295</sup> Jean Starobinski, 'L'Encre de la mélancolie', *Nouvelle Revue française*, 21 (March 1963), 410-23 (p. 416).

né per mille rivolte anchor son mosso' (118.13-14); 'i' pur vo sempre, et non son anchor mosso' (209.6).

In a specifically Freudian sense, Petrarch's lyric subject reveals many symptoms of melancholia as deducible from the essay 'Mourning and Melancholia': 'a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love [i.e. 'to adopt any new object of love'], inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings' (*SE* XIV:244). This latter, which distinguishes melancholia most clearly from mourning according to Freud, is discernible in Petrarch's moral anguish, which from the 'vergogna' of the opening poem (1.12) shows itself in self-incrimination and repeated expressions of guilt. Nonetheless, this 'self-tormenting in melancholia [...] is', Freud tells us, 'without doubt enjoyable' (*SE* XIV:251), an observation with which Petrarch, for whom tears provide a bitterly pleasurable experience, would concur. Lacking in Petrarch is, however, the unconscious nature of melancholic loss (*SE* XIV:247); rather, the *Canzoniere* seems to represent a hyper-conscious examination of the doleful impact of another's absence on the self.

Petrarch's melancholia, like its Freudian analogue, involves fidelity to the memory of Laura and a conscious refusal of any new amorous attachments. The declaration 'per morte né per doglia | non vo' che da tal nodo Amor mi scioglia' (59.16-17) resonates with Freud's own theory of libidinal attachments, in which, as discussed in Chapter One in relation to Dante, melancholia signifies a refusal of the necessary decathexis (detachment) from the lost love object in order to redirect one's affections towards a new object, as happens in the work of mourning. That the poetic self's melancholia appears to pre-exist Laura's actual death, and in fact to be a near

constant of the *Canzoniere* from the start, might in fact suggest that Laura is loved throughout as an unattainable, lost object.

In other details further parallels can be adduced between the Petrarchan experience of love and Freudian melancholia. The consequence of insomnia is, for instance, common to the descriptions of both Petrarch and Freud (*SE* XIV:246; *RVF* 22, the ‘notti dolenti’ after Laura’s death of 282.2, and ‘le mie notti il sonno | sbandiro’ of 360.62–3). Finally, it is arguable that Petrarch’s poetry depicts a mournful denuding of the outside world at the same time as a melancholic reduction of the lyric subject’s sense of self, following Freud’s assertion that ‘In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself’ (*SE* XIV:246). In the *Canzoniere*, the emptiness of the physical landscape, which becomes for the poet ‘un deserto alpestro’ (306.8) is accompanied by a comparable desertification of the self (‘sono un deserto’, 310.14).<sup>296</sup>

Like Freudian melancholia, and following the infernal model of Pier della Vigna, Petrarch’s loss is also envisioned as ‘an open wound’,<sup>297</sup> as in the last line of *RVF* 90, ‘piaga per allentar d’arco non sana’, with its Cavalcantian echoes of the ‘ferita’ in the heart which is an ‘aperto segno’.<sup>298</sup> Heather Webb writes that ‘Poetry, for Cavalcanti, is

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<sup>296</sup> In the context, the phrase ‘sono un deserto’ literally describes how in his grief the birds, flowers, and other ladies seem now to be transformed into ‘un deserto, et fere aspre et selvagge’ (v. 14). However, through the ambiguity of ‘[loro] sono’ and ‘[io] sono’, the phrase can also be heard as implicitly simultaneously lamenting the barrenness of the self.

<sup>297</sup> ‘The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies [...] from all directions, and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished’ (*SE* XIV:253). The image is, of course, a cliché, but it is nonetheless interesting that Freud uses it to define melancholia after its long lyric history. See Wells, *The Secret Wound*, pp. 74–5, Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 118–57, and Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 1–9.

<sup>298</sup> Guido Cavalcanti, *Rime. Con le rime di Iacopo Cavalcanti*, ed. by Domenico De Robertis (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), ‘Tu m’hai sì piena di dolor la mente’, pp. 28–9, v. 14.

precisely this act of speaking through the wound’,<sup>299</sup> and the same can be said of Petrarch. Freud’s comments on the characteristic monotony of melancholic language may also be illuminating regarding the repetitive nature of Petrarch’s obsessive poetry:

In analyses it often becomes evident that first one and then another memory is activated, and that the laments which always sound the same and are wearisome in their monotony nevertheless take their rise each time in some different unconscious source. (*SE* XIV:256)

After Freud, monotony remains a key element of Kristevan melancholia, as a consequence of which, exemplarily, ‘le débit de l’énonciation est lent, les silences sont longs et fréquents, les rythmes ralentissent, les intonations se font monotones’ (*SN*, p. 46). Like Freud, Kristeva believes that in melancholia speech is difficult, and therefore fragmented and interrupted.

Aptly, Petrarch continually describes the writing of his poetry as painful and difficult, and in this he can be heard to be harking back to the infernal situation. He defines his poetry as ‘le dolenti mie parole estreme’ (126.13) and ‘rime dolenti’ (333.1), phrases which echo the ‘dolenti note’ (*Inf*.V.25) and “‘sospiri dolenti” (*Inf*.IX.126) of the “‘spirti dolenti” (*Inf*.I.116) in the infernal ‘città dolente’ (*Inf*.III.1). As in the infernal situation, so in Petrarch there is a persistent and pervasive sense that the source of his poetry, weeping, and sighing, is at the same time an impediment to self-expression. In *RVF* 49, for instance, speech is interrupted rather than fuelled by ‘Lagime triste’ (v. 9) and ‘sospiri [...] lenti et rotti’ (v. 13). In this same sonnet, the lyric subject complains in an apostrophe of the inadequacy of his speaking tongue: ‘ti stai | sempre più fredda, et se parole fai, | son imperfecte, et quasi d’uom che sogna’ (vv. 6–8). These lines present the difficult, reluctant poetic words as broken, incomplete, and oneiric in an observation

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<sup>299</sup> Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 75.

that might be extended to much of the *Canzoniere*. Petrarch's poems can be read, in short, as a fight against as well as a record of 'voci interrotte' (224.6). An emblematic performance of the stammering breakdown of language is described in sonnet 20, where the (successfully reached) end of the poem coincides ironically with resignation at the impossibility of speech:

Piú volte già per dir le labbra apersi,  
poi rimase la voce in mezzo 'l pecto:  
ma qual sòn poria mai salir tant'alto?

Piú volte incominciai di scriver versi:  
ma la penna et la mano et l'intellecto  
rimaser vinti nel primier assalto. (vv. 9-14)

In this sestet, Petrarch considers speech and writing as directly comparable, so that the broken, impeded, interrupted, repetitive characteristics of spoken language are challenges also faced by the melancholic writer.

Supporting these quotations is the fact that one of the most emblematic 'paradigms of the poet's voice' in the *Canzoniere* is acknowledged to be that of Echo, who is explicitly featured in *RVF* 23 but is arguably an important implicit model throughout: 'Echo, the maiden who loves Narcissus and whose love is not returned, is damned to repeat sounds and exist as pure voice ['voce rimasi', 23.139], while her body by the mercy of the gods is changed to stone'.<sup>300</sup> In Ovid's text, Echo's powers of speech are reduced to "'brevissimus usus'": 'tantum haec in fine loquendi | ingeminate voces auditaque verba reportat'; '*She merely repeats the concluding phrases of a speech and returns the words she hears*'.<sup>301</sup> Echo's reduction in linguistic power to repetitive and incomplete words might stand as a mythological equivalent of the repetitive and monotonous voice of the Kristevan melancholic. That Echo is transformed into a stone

<sup>300</sup> Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 79.

<sup>301</sup> *Met.* 3.367-9 (I, pp. 150/1).

(the ‘dura selce’ of 23.138) is, moreover, particularly significant for the poet’s self-identification given the root of the self-appointed name *Petrarca*.<sup>302</sup>

Several of Petrarch’s prose works offer further evidence for such a reading of his poetry as inspired by a poetics of melancholic fragmentation and linguistic collapse. In the third book of the *Secretum*, a text to which I return at the end of this chapter, disrupted language is interpreted as a sign of unhealthy love, in the following words of Augustinus (Petrarch’s conscience, based on St Augustine) to Franciscus (Petrarch’s enamoured alter ego):

Hinc pallor et macies et languescens ante tempus flos etatis; tum graves eternumque madentes oculi, tum confusa mens et turbata quies in somnis; et dormientis flebiles querele, ac vox fragilis luctu rauca, fractusque et interruptus verborum sonus, et quicquid tumultuosius aut miserius fingi potest. (*Secretum*, p. 156)

*That is why you are so pale and thin and listless, even though you are still in the prime of life; that is why your eyes are always sad and full of tears, your mind confused, your rest disturbed; why you cry out mournfully in your sleep; why your voice is weak and hoarse with lamentation, your words broken and hesitant; why you are altogether more wretched than can be imagined.* (MSB, p. 67)

In a version of the *Triumphus Cupidinis*, love is similarly seen to produce ‘rotto parlar con subito silenzio’,<sup>303</sup> while in the *Bucolicum carmen* it is declared ‘Hinc labor, hinc amor exagitant coguntque trementem | interrupta loqui’, ‘*Harried by toil on the one hand, shaken by love on the other, / Only brief words can I utter*’.<sup>304</sup> It is interesting to note here the confluence between melancholic and amorous speech, which in theoretical terms is noticeable in the similarity between Kristevan melancholic language

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<sup>302</sup> See Remo Ceserani, “‘Petrarca’: Il nome come auto-reinvenzione poetica”, *Quaderni petrarcheschi*, 4 (1987), 121-37.

<sup>303</sup> Petrarcha, *Trionfi, Rime estravaganti, Codice degli abbozzi*, ed. by Vinicio Pacca and Laura Paolino (Milan: Mondadori, 1996), p. 174. The editors do not accept these interpolated lines as valid, but quote them in the notes as a frequently reported version.

<sup>304</sup> Petrarch’s ‘*Bucolicum carmen*’, trans. by Thomas G. Bergin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), Eclogue III, vv. 5-6, pp. 30/1.

and the language of lovers as characterised in Roland Barthes's *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*. In the latter, as its title suggests, Barthes argues that the lover speaks in a chaotic, disordered, fragmentary manner, in 'bouffées de langage', 'bris de discours', and 'paquets de phrases', in a style, that is, which seems to anticipate the linguistic analyses of *Soleil noir*.<sup>305</sup>

On the one hand, in the light of these quotations, there seems to be a conflict between form and content in Petrarch, as his emphasis on broken, interrupted speech, indicative of infernal melancholia and amorous discourse, is never really translated from theoretical statement to poetic practice. Petrarch's poetics markedly do not endorse a splintering of language, but rather present a smoothness, 'dolcezza', and continuity of surface which provides an elegant veneer for the tormented subject matter beneath, even if monotony, as in Gianfranco Contini's controversial description of Petrarch's poetic language,<sup>306</sup> is one element of Kristevan distorted language (and of Freudian melancholia, as I have noted). On the other hand, however, it is striking that on a macro-textual level, broken or fragmented language is at the heart of Petrarch's poetic enterprise, as the very titles of his collection, first *Liber fragmentorum* then *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, intimate.<sup>307</sup> As the opening line of the proemial sonnet of the book confirms, these poems are 'rime sparse' (1.1). Petrarch's poems are scattered, fragmentary, and discontinuous in their intratextual relations, and the frequent silences between each

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<sup>305</sup> Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, pp. 10 and 11. Lombardi notes that 'the *Canzoniere* seems to anachronistically verify Roland Barthes's meditation on the discourse of love as necessarily lonely, fragmentary and citational', "'I desire therefore I am'", p. 41.

<sup>306</sup> Contini draws a distinction between Petrarchan 'monolinguismo' and Dantean 'plurilinguismo' which is understandable if somewhat reductive as regards Petrarch, whose own variety seems to suffer in comparison. See Contini, *Varianti e altra linguistica*, pp. 169-92.

<sup>307</sup> See Francisco Rico, "'Rime sparse'", "'Rerum vulgarium fragmenta'": Sul titolo e sul primo sonetto del "Canzoniere", trans. by S. Bogliolo, in *Il 'Canzoniere' di Francesco Petrarca: La critica contemporanea*, ed. by Gennaro Barbarisi and Claudia Berra (Milan: Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto, 1992), pp. 117-44.

microtext are a notable feature of the collection. Furthermore, this scattering is mirrored in the descriptive fragmentation of both Laura and the poetic subject, as Nancy Vickers has highlighted.<sup>308</sup> Petrarch's poetic self is 'diviso et sparso' (135.26), just as Laura has hair 'a l'aura sparsi' (90.1) or after her death is reduced to 'cenere sparso' (320.14).

For Kristeva, such fragmentation is the sign of a 'cannibalisme mélancolique' in which the lost object is 'Plutôt morcelé, déchiqueté, coupé, avalé, digéré... que perdu' (SN, p. 21). In Petrarch's poetry, at a textual level, this cannibalistic, melancholic disintegration is enacted through the breaking down not only of Laura's body into its constituent parts (*occhi, capei, petto*, etc.) but also of her very name into its constituent letters and syllables (in the 'Lau/re/ta' of RVF 5, for instance, as I explore in Chapter Three from a Derridean angle). Thus, Petrarch's attempt to render Laura present in writing paradoxically ensures her disappearance and destruction. Kristeva's questioning words are highly pertinent to the Petrarchan situation:

Nous aboutissons à la *trahison* par excellence de la Chose unique et en soi (de la *Res divina*) : si toutes les manières de la nommer sont permises, la Chose postulée en soi ne se dissout-elle pas dans les mille et une manières de la nommer ? [...] La croyance initiale en la traduction se transforme en une croyance dans la performance stylistique pour laquelle l'en deçà du texte, son autre, fût-il originaire, compte moins que la réussite du texte même. (SN, p. 78)

Leo Bersani, too, suggests that 'sexual desire initiates, indeed can be recognized by, an agitated fantasmatic activity in which the original (but, from the start, unlocatable) objects of desire get lost in the images they generate'.<sup>309</sup> In the *Canzoniere*, similarly, it is arguable that the text's own endless theme and variations on Laura engulf the very being

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<sup>308</sup> Nancy J. Vickers, 'Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme', in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. by Elizabeth Abel (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 95-109 (p. 108), and 'The Body Re-membered: Petrarchan Lyric and the Strategies of Description', in *Mimesis: From Mirror to Method, Augustine to Descartes*, ed. by John D. Lyons and Stephen G. Nichols, Jr (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1982), pp. 100-9.

<sup>309</sup> Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 28.

they seek to portray. Yet the reduction of Laura to fragmentary identifying markers, whether corporeal or onomastic, is simultaneously an effective means of rendering her omnipresent and unforgettable, as she is everywhere and nowhere, and remains hauntingly elusive. The polysemy of Laura's name is a source of great richness even as it undermines her tangibility and integrity. In this regard, Kristeva's postulation of creative melancholia's 'subtile alchimie des signes [...] – musicalisation des signifiants, polyphonie des lexèmes, désarticulation des unités lexicales, syntaxiques, narratives' (SN, p. 112) seems to be a good definition of the beauty and distinctiveness of the *Canzoniere*'s poetic language as epitomised in Petrarch's onomastic play.

It is thus possible to speak of a Kristevan form of creative melancholia in the *Canzoniere*, as the inevitability of melancholic fragmentation is at once an impediment to poetry and an incitement to the creation of a new poetic language. It is, then, peculiarly appropriate that the very word 'lagrime' should contain 'rime' within it, emphasising the continuity of melancholia and writing for Petrarch. In this manner declarations such as 'vo lagrimando' (22.12), 'son fonte di lagrime' (135.53), 'spendo 'l mio tempo lagrimando' (216.4), and 'Lagrimar sempre è 'l mio sommo diletto' (226.5) contain melancholic echoes of the writing of poetry, which add a subtle note of metatextual reflection on the source of creativity to lines of otherwise pure lament. Celebration of tears as directly translatable into poetry is a strong undercurrent in such phrases; 'vo [...]rimando', 'son fonte di [...]rime', 'spendo 'l mio tempo [...]rimando', and '[...]rimar sempre è 'l mio sommo diletto' contribute to an implicitly grateful commentary on the necessity and pleasure of poesis. A similar element of destabilising polysemy is discernible in the word 'versi', which refers interchangeably to the lines of poetry themselves as to the outpouring of grief. This polysemy is particularly audible in

sestina 29, one of whose key words is precisely ‘versi’, and which signifies both the weeping of tears (‘Lagrime dunque che dagli occhi versi’, v. 29) and the construction of poetry (‘So io ben ch’a voler chiuder in versi’, v. 50). Petrarch’s poems represent not a cure or a triumph over melancholia, but at least a form of what Kristeva would call survival (‘du moins une survie’, *SN*, p. 62). Starobinski’s observation that ‘Rien, semble-t-il, n’a progressé, mais un poème mélancolique est né’ can equally be considered emblematic of the poetic achievement of melancholia in the *Canzoniere*.<sup>310</sup>

It is also important to recognise that Petrarch’s problem posed in Kristevan terms is not so much that he has lost Laura, but that he is unable to lose her. Petrarch’s melancholia is concomitant with his refusal to participate in the work of mourning necessary to free him from his painful and hopeless attachment to Laura. As Kristeva explains succinctly, ‘Ma dépression me signale que je ne sais pas perdre’ (*SN*, p. 14). Melancholia is definable, then, as ‘le deuil problématique de l’objet perdu... pas si perdu que ça’ (*SN*, p. 41); it is synonymous, for Kristeva, as for Freud, with impossible mourning. The living Hell of Petrarch’s poetic self is not a site of loss, but rather an ‘enfer à ne pas perdre’ (*SN*, p. 58). Strangely, Laura seems even more present after her death than she was during her lifetime. It is only in poems after her death that she speaks, or visits the poet, or expresses her affection for him (see, for instance, *RVF* 282, 302, 356, 359). Since these visits are nocturnal, and often end with the poet waking up (e.g. ‘dopo questo si parte ella, e ’l sonno’, 359.71), doubt is thereby cast on the significance of these experiences, which are situated in an oneiric space that is earthly rather than supernatural. As Zygmunt Barański has convincingly illustrated, these dreams ultimately lack any external or divine reality (along the lines of the Dantean model) and are situated

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<sup>310</sup> Starobinski, ‘L’Encre de la mélancolie’, p. 417.

instead within the poet's imaginative remembering.<sup>311</sup> Yet these dreams retain an ambiguous status through their claims to visionary status given their timing, since early-morning dreams immediately prior to waking were considered, in the Middle Ages, to be prophetic. As Dante-poet explains on recounting his true dream of Lucia carrying him to the gate of Purgatory, just before dawn is the time when 'la mente nostra [...] a le sue vision quasi è divina' (*Purg.*IX.16-18).

These recurrent dreams in the second half of the *Canzoniere* highlight the aptness of the periphrastic definition of Laura after her death as 'lei che 'l ciel non poria lontana farne, | ch'i' l'ò negli occhi' (176.6-7). To his customary lamentation of Laura's physical absence after her demise, Petrarch adds a note of personal rather than divine consolation: 'Ma pur ognor presente | nel mezzo del meo cor madonna siede' (324.10-11); she is 'quella ch'or m'è piú che mai presente' (352.8). The problem for Petrarch, it seems, is not Laura's absence, but her incessant, obsession-inducing presence, in the lyric subject's mournful dreams, memory, imagination, and, above all, in his poetry. In this respect, presenting an object as lost, as Petrarch does, is paradoxically an act of appropriation and the only sure means for the subject to find the object desirable and continually present: loss and omnipresence are strangely inextricable. As Giorgio Agamben has explored, this situation replicates one in which 'ciò che non poteva essere perduto perché non era mai stato posseduto appare come perduto e ciò che non poteva essere posseduto perché, forse, non era mai stato reale, può essere appropriato in quanto

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<sup>311</sup> Zygmunt G. Barański, "'Piangendo e cantando" con Orfeo (e con Dante): Strutture emotive e strutture poetiche in *RVF* 281-90', in *Il Canzoniere: Lettura micro e macrotestuale*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2007), pp. 617-40. Kenelm Foster, in contrast, argues that these *post mortem* apparition poems really do represent Laura finally as a subject rather than an object. See his *Petrarch: Poet and Humanist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), p. 83.

oggetto perduto'.<sup>312</sup> Petrarch's poetry reveals, in such terms, a complex relation to the ultimately unlosable love object and the inspiration to be creative that such an embracing of melancholia affords.

### *Petrarch's melancholic rewriting of Dante*

Having established the pervasiveness of melancholic language on a micro-textual and a macro-textual level in Petrarch, it is to the related discussion of the presence of infernal language in the *Canzoniere* that I now turn. While there are innumerable instances, in Petrarch, of deliberate intertextual recollections of all parts of Dante's oeuvre, I wish to highlight here those in particular which seem to inscribe Petrarch's poetic landscape as infernal, as a place of endless melancholia like Dante's first *cantica* but beyond which Petrarch cannot and does not truly desire to move. In this respect, Dante's Francesca is a particularly enigmatic and compelling figure for Petrarch, and I argue that she is representative of a poetic aspect of *Inferno* which Petrarch tries to restore to a non-infernal context, with mixed, unstable results. In the process of assessing Petrarch's reworking of Dantean themes and images, comparison of the *Canzoniere* with the *Vita nuova* also leads to an important recognition of vital points of contact and areas of dispute between the two works.

Petrarch's relationship to Dante's works has been widely documented, often in terms of a form of Bloomian 'anxiety of influence'<sup>313</sup> in which Petrarch combines denial

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<sup>312</sup> Agamben, *Stanze*, p. 26.

<sup>313</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

of knowledge of Dante with an incorporation of close textual echoes of the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia* into his own writing. Most importantly for the discussion at hand, Petrarch frequently evokes instances from Dante's *Inferno* which I have highlighted as examples of melancholia, such as the state of the souls in Limbo, or specific figures such as Capaneus, as if in order to align the situation of his poetic 'I' with that of Dante's damned souls. Yet Petrarch's poetry does not, of course, follow a strict moral structure as Dante's does, and so the infernal resonances do not always or necessarily entail condemnation, let alone damnation. Petrarch's poetry thus signals the discovery of a new type of melancholia that is a source of inspiration for a certain type of writing unlike the melancholic experience of the infernal sinners which is more usually an obstacle to self-expression.

In the *Commedia*, as we have seen in Chapter One, the journey – both physical (of Dante-pilgrim) and linguistic (of Dante-narrator) – is a way of travelling beyond infernal melancholia and purgatorial mourning to a realm of beatitude and closure. Concomitant with these three stages are three different linguistic models: firstly, the broken, painful speech of the damned souls in *Inferno* which I have enumerated; secondly, the productive use of speech and reference to written texts (from biblical, Classical, and vernacular traditions) which enables the work of mourning to take place in *Purgatorio*; and thirdly, a state of '[t]rasumanar' (*Par.I.70*) which goes beyond mourning and melancholia and in a sense beyond language too. Overarching all three models is Dante-narrator's faith in language – both reading and writing – as a means to salvation, as confirmed by Beatrice's instructions at the end of *Purgatorio*: “in pro del mondo che mal vive, | [...] quel che vedi, | ritornato di là, fa che tu scrive” (*Purg.XXXII.103-5*).

In the *Canzoniere*, in contrast, I contend that Petrarch identifies most often with the infernal model of repetitive, painful, and broken speech. In Dantean terms, infernal language is pointless as, unlike its purgatorial counterpart, it does not and cannot produce any change or improvement. It is also solitary in contrast to purgatorial collectivity. For Petrarch, however, the purpose and action of writing is less clear-cut. Petrarch's melancholic and monomaniacal language, while painful and, it seems, unable to lead to salvation, can be read as a sign of a triumphant and creative form of speaking melancholia. His poetic language is both a product and a continuation of his melancholia, and although it places itself in relation to the *Inferno*, it is more ambiguous for its being positioned outside any fixed moral structure. It is in this sense that Petrarch's poetics can be described as an attempt to recuperate Dantean infernal melancholia. Giorgio Orelli describes Petrarch as 'in gara col Dante "infernale"',<sup>314</sup> while Peter Kuon suggests that in Petrarch there is at work a 'trasferimento dell'Inferno dall'aldilà all'aldiqua e dall'esteriore all'interiore'.<sup>315</sup> For Petrarch, it is life which is 'questo inferno' (345.10). Importantly, Marguerite Waller stresses the relocation of infernal language in a universe that is no longer stringently moral. She notes that in Petrarch 'the diversion of attention from questions of morality and will toward purely linguistic problems is becoming inevitable' and that consequently 'Infernal discourse in particular needs to be understood not as a function of willful perversion but as the appropriate subject and discourse of poetry.'<sup>316</sup> I approach the question of the presence

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<sup>314</sup> Giorgio Orelli, *Il suono dei sospiri: Sul Petrarca volgare* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), p. 138.

<sup>315</sup> Peter Kuon, *L'aura dantesca: Metamorfosi intertestuali nei 'Rerum vulgarium fragmenta' di Francesco Petrarca* (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2004), p. 82.

<sup>316</sup> Marguerite Waller, *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 42.

of *Inferno* in Petrarch firstly via one sonnet in particular, *RVF* 124, which stages, in condensed form, some important aspects of Petrarch's engagement with Dante:

Amor, Fortuna et la mia mente, schiva  
di quel che vede e nel passato volta,  
m'affligon sì ch'io porto alcuna volta  
invidia a quei che son su l'altra riva.

Amor mi strugge 'l cor, Fortuna il priva  
d'ogni conforto, onde la mente stolta  
s'adira et piange: et così in pena molta  
sempre conven che combattendo viva.

Né spero i dolci dì tornino indietro,  
ma pur di male in peggio quel ch'avanza;  
et di mio corso ò già passato 'l mezzo.

Lasso, non di diamante, ma d'un vetro  
veggio di man cadermi ogni speranza,  
et tutti miei pensier' romper nel mezzo.

This poem wonderfully encapsulates the deep-rooted melancholia of Petrarch's poetic voice, in its hopelessness, monomania,<sup>317</sup> nostalgia, and brokenness, as well as in its use of melancholic language drawn from Dante's *Inferno* and the *Vita nuova*. In the opening lines, Petrarch dismisses the external, identifiable causes of his affliction, 'Amor, Fortuna' with the briefest of references, and instead concentrates on the personal, internal motives associated with 'la mia mente'. The opening pair is rendered even more distant by the personification of these two figures indicated by their initial capitals, and it is the 'mente' which instead takes centre stage. Appropriately, then, this same pattern is repeated in the second quatrain, in which again 'Amor' and 'Fortuna', although now expanded to a full phrase each, are once more eclipsed by the focus on the 'mente', whose trials fill a further two and a half lines.

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<sup>317</sup> As already noted in Chapter One, Hawkins identifies *Inferno* as monomaniacal, and I consider this term valid for Petrarch too, particularly in the later poet's deliberate infernal echoes. Hainsworth also suggests the usefulness of the concept of monomania for Petrarch (*Petrarch the Poet*, p. 110).

In the first quatrain the mind is described as sick of the present ('quel che vede') and absorbed by the past ('nel passato volta'). The mind's obsession with the past and hence memory seems particularly apt if we remember that in medieval use the word 'mente' could in fact mean both mind and memory. The backwards glance emblematises loss in its obvious Orphic overtones; implicitly, the reader is led to assume that the poet's gaze behind will be met with the same emptiness as that of Orpheus whose forbidden backwards glance was punished by Eurydice vanishing from his sight. (The importance of the Orpheus myth for Dante, Petrarch, and Proust is returned to in Chapter Three.)

Petrarch presents himself as a passive victim ('m'affligon') of circumstance but also, importantly, of his own fragmented self, so that the 'mente' tormenting the lyric 'I' might suggest the self-loathing and self-torture of Freudian melancholia. It is as a similarly passive, detached observer that the subject watches fall – but does not himself drop – from his hand 'ogni speranza'. The poet's response to his suffering is a desire for death, as indicated clearly in lines 3–4. The counterpart to such a desire is the definition of life as unending conflict in lines 7–8: 'in pena molta | sempre conven che combattendo [la mente/io] viva'. The combination of the adverb 'sempre' in emphatic position at the start of the line, followed by the axiomatic, objective 'conven che' with its alliteration of the harsh 'c' sound continued into the gerund 'combattendo', heightens the pathos, duration, and inexorability of the statement.

Such initial observations are important evidence of the melancholic tenor of the poem, but, as I have already intimated, it should be borne in mind that the reading of this poem as suffused by melancholia relies also and to a great extent on its intertextual engagements with Dante's *Infèrno* and the *Vita nuova* most prominently. Part of the

reason that the reader is able to recognise this poem as melancholic is through its use of infernal language: ‘l’altra riva’ (v. 4; *Inf.*III.86); the verb *adirarsi* (v. 7; compare *Inf.*VIII.121, “perch’ io m’adiri”); the harsh rhymes (the rhyme ‘mezzo’ vv. 11 and 14, used by Dante, for instance *Inf.*XVII.83–7, mezzo: riprezzo: rezzo).<sup>318</sup>

In other instances of Dantean borrowing within *RVF* 124, an allusion to *Purgatorio* acts as an implicit point of contrast between Dante and Petrarch. For the former, as Chapter One explores, Purgatory is the realm of a simultaneous purification and recuperation of the past, and of friendship; the regret of ‘lo dì c’han detto ai dolci amici addio’ (*Purg.*VIII.3) anticipates the repeated reunion with friends (in the very *canto* that this line opens, Nino Visconti) which punctuates the journey of Dante-pilgrim up the mountain.<sup>319</sup> For Petrarch, however, the laconic evocation of ‘i dolci dì’ (v. 9) serves only to stress the irrecoverability of the past.

Complementing the lost past, the only future envisioned in Petrarch’s sonnet is unremittingly bleak. It is declared ‘pur di male in peggio quel ch’avanza’ (v. 10), itself a phrase which recalls Dante’s *Paradiso* (“pur di male in peggio si travasa”, *Par.*XXI.126), where Dante’s collective concern (in this instance, the decadence of the Church) highlights the more unashamedly personal and individualistic outlook of Petrarch’s words. One might also more usefully interpret the description ‘di male in peggio’ as a depiction of the general state of *Inferno*, throughout which realm the sins become ever more serious and the punishments ever more terrible, as well as of the only future that the damned souls can anticipate, that of the Last Judgment when, united with their earthly bodies, their suffering will increase (see Virgil’s explanation, *Inf.*VI.103–11). To

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<sup>318</sup> See Paolo Trovato, *Dante in Petrarca: Per un inventario dei dantismi nei ‘Rerum vulgarium fragmenta’* (Florence: Leo Olschki, 1979), p. 108.

<sup>319</sup> On the complexity of reunion in the *Commedia*, see Gragnoli, ‘Nostalgia in Heaven’.

borrow a phrase from later in *Inferno*, the situation can only worsen, ‘accumulando duol con duolo’ (*Inf.*XXVIII.110).

Petrarch’s lack of hope, indicated by his attitude towards the future, is a consistent complaint in the *Canzoniere*, with echoes of the virtuous pagans consigned to Dante’s Limbo and of whom Virgil declares “‘sanza speme vivemo in disio’” (*Inf.*IV.42). The Petrarchan experience of love is presented in similar terms, both before Laura’s death, when the poet declares ‘vivo del desir fuor di speranza’ (73.78), and afterwards, when the same situation is couched in even stronger words: ‘l desir vive, et la speranza è morta’ (277.4). Petrarch has no hope and no future, living instead in the past amongst his cherished memories.

In the poem in question here, the sestet opens with a strong adversative (‘Né spero’) and continues with the image of ‘ogni speranza’ falling from his hand and shattering like broken glass. In terms of language, the most obvious precedent for this image is from Cino da Pistoia’s ‘Oimè, lasso, quelle trezze bionde’, which contains the line ‘[la speranza] spezzat’hai come vetro’ (v. 25).<sup>320</sup> The presence of the exclamation ‘Lasso’ at the start of the line, as in the opening of Cino’s poem, might confirm the Cinian intertext. Yet the sestet contains, alongside this reference to Cino, the most explicit and striking Dantean references of the whole sonnet. The last line of the first tercet, ‘et di mio corso ò già passato ’l mezzo’ recalls the famous *incipit* of Dante’s *Commedia*, ‘Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita’ (*Inf.*I.1). Yet Petrarch’s life-journey differs from that of Dante in that it is a solo venture. While ‘nostra vita’ hints at Dante’s ever-keen sense of communality and the importance of the individual in society, the Petrarchan ‘mio corso’ is further evidence of the later poet’s self-absorption and love of

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<sup>320</sup> *Poeti del dolce stil nuovo*, ed. by Mario Marti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1969), pp. 714–17, as noted by Franco Suitner, *Petrarca e la tradizione stilnovistica* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1977), p. 132.

solitude, while also referring to a subsequent point in *Inferno*, where Dante-pilgrim promises to Brunetto Latini ““Ciò che narrate di mio corso scrivo”” (*Inf.*XV.88). Petrarch positions himself alongside the sinners of *Inferno* through his monomania and self-absorption. He is resistant to any participation in ‘l’amoroso choro’ (93.6) and instead rejects “l vulgo a me nemico et odioso’ (234.12), whereas following the Dantean, purgatorial model, humbly embracing being part of a group would have led to beneficial, therapeutic effects through the establishment of a community of voices.

Even more crucial is the fact that Petrarch seems to have experienced a moment of crisis like that depicted at the start of the *Commedia*, except that while for Dante-pilgrim this experience leads to his rescue and conversion, for the Petrarchan subject the crisis is ongoing and unresolved: he has missed (‘già passato’) his Dantean chance. Further evidence of a failed Dantean conversion can be adduced from other poems, notably *RVF* 54, a madrigal whose closing line reads ‘tornai indietro quasi a mezzo ’l giorno’ (v. 10), and which Michelangelo Picone, reading it against the background of *Inferno* I, argues ‘si oppone sul piano della *littera* al movimento sempre in avanti del poeta-pellegrino della *Commedia*’.<sup>321</sup> Picone’s reading of *RVF* 189 also sees the Petrarchan subject’s plight as ‘antitetica a quella del protagonista del primo canto dell’*Inferno*’;<sup>322</sup> while Dante-pilgrim reaches the metaphoric shore and safety (*Inf.*1.22-7), Petrarch’s poetic self is still in the middle of the sea and in grave danger of shipwreck. Such instances lend support to the observations that ‘the *Canzoniere* ends, in a sense,

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<sup>321</sup> See Michelangelo Picone, ‘Tempo e racconto nel “Canzoniere” di Petrarca’, in *Omaggio a Gianfranco Folena*, 3 vols (Padua: Editoriale Programma, 1993), I, pp. 581-92 (p. 591).

<sup>322</sup> Michelangelo Picone, ‘Il sonetto CLXXXIX’, *Lectura Petrarce*, 10 (1990), 151-77 (pp. 167, 169).

where *Inferno* begins’,<sup>323</sup> and that at the end ‘Petrarch is still where Dante was at the beginning of the *Commedia*’.<sup>324</sup>

An un-Dantean turning back is also the focus of *RVF* 15, the octet of which describes particularly well the immobility, suffering and downward glance of the melancholic:

Io mi rivolgo indietro a ciascun passo  
col corpo stanco ch’a gran pena porto,  
et prendo allor del vostr’aere conforto,  
che ’l fa gir oltra dicendo: Oimè lasso!

Poi ripensando al dolce ben ch’io lasso,  
al camin lungo et al mio viver corto,  
fermo le piante sbigottito et smorto,  
et gli occhi in terra lagrimando abasso. (15.1-8)

Turning back is even recommended in a later poem by Petrarch, even if the context is this time almost comic in its pithiness, lacking the usual gravity surrounding the theme: ‘Chi smarrita à la strada, torni indietro’ (105.12), with evident echoes of the opening of *Inferno* (‘la diritta via [...] smarrita’, *Inf.*1.3). In this context, it is useful to recall that at the entrance to Purgatory proper, Dante-pilgrim is forbidden by the angel guardian to look behind him as he crosses the threshold: “Intrate; ma facciovì accorti | che di fuor torna chi ’n dietro si guata” (*Purg.*IX.131-2).<sup>325</sup> The fact that Petrarch’s lyric subject, despite a degree of unwillingness, does give in to his desire to turn back contrasts starkly with Dante-pilgrim’s deliberate forward-facing stance both at the start of *Inferno*, with Virgil’s encouragement, and as he begins to ascend the mountain of Purgatory in earnest. Purgatorial forward progress is impossible in the *Canzoniere*, where the action of turning back to an infernal, inescapable situation is repeated again and again. Petrarch

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<sup>323</sup> Waller, *Petrarch’s Poetics and Literary History*, p. 76.

<sup>324</sup> Robert Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 84.

<sup>325</sup> For a discussion of this moment in the poem, see Armour, *The Door of Purgatory*, especially pp. 43-4.

can be said to *revolt* against Dante in the etymological sense of the word outlined by Kristeva, which is that precisely of a turning back or ‘retournement’, from the Latin *volvere* and the Italian *voltare*.<sup>326</sup> Such a re-volt or regression goes not only against the Dantean model but also against the advice offered to Petrarch’s alter ego Franciscus towards the close of the *Secretum*, ‘I securus et propera, nec in tergum deflexeris; preteritorum obliviscens, in anteriora contende’, ‘Go quickly, without looking back. Forget the past, and make your way into the future’ (*Secretum*, p. 172; *MSB*, p. 75).

In sonnet 15, it is, moreover, notable that while Dante-narrator’s description of the ‘selva oscura’ focuses on Virgil’s finding and rescuing of the pilgrim, Virgil being the ‘ben ch’i’ vi trovai’ (*Inf*.1.8), Petrarch’s narrative is one of loss, a lament of the ‘dolce ben ch’io lasso’ (v. 5), in a contrasting parallel echo of the Dantean situation. Petrarch’s opening line echoes Dante’s ‘l’animo mio [...] | si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo’ (*Inf*.1.25–6), thereby signalling from the start the importance of the intertextual presence of *Inferno* I for this sonnet. Petrarch’s ‘corpo stanco’ is also comparable to Dante-pilgrim’s ‘corpo lasso’ (*Inf*.1.28), while the rhyme scheme running through each passage is identical (*RVF* 15 passo: lasso: abasso; *Inf*.1.26–30 passo: lasso: basso).

To return to *RVF* 124, the emphasis on brokenness in the final tercet contains further important Dantean resonances. Firstly, the image of glass harks back to the image of the final circle of Hell as a frozen lake, ‘un lago che per gelo | avea di vetro e non d’acqua sembiante’ (*Inf*.XXXII.23–4). This imagery is later repeated in depiction of the damned who ‘trasparien come festuca in vetro’ (*Inf*.XXXIV.12). The contrast to be drawn between the unshatterable glassy ice of *Inferno*, which even if a mountain

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<sup>326</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs et limites de la psychanalyse*, 2 vols (Paris: Fayard, 1996–97), I: *Sens et non-sens de la révolte*, pp. 8–14.

collapsed on top of it ‘non avria pur da l’orlo fatto cricchi’ (*Inf.*XXXII.30), and Petrarch’s dashed hopes which resemble broken glass highlights the fragility of the Petrarchan self.

Moreover, the final line of the poem, ‘et tutti miei pensier’ romper nel mezzo’, contains echoes of both *Inferno* XIII and the *Vita nuova*. As Santagata notes,<sup>327</sup> the reader is reminded of Virgil’s instructions to Dante in the wood of the suicides: “‘Se tu tronchi | qualche frascetta d’una d’este piante, | li pensier c’hai si faran tutti monchi”’ (*Inf.*XIII.28–30). However, for Dante-pilgrim the breaking of the branch puts an end to his questioning ‘pensier’, which are ‘monchi’, cut off, in a satisfying way (by reaching a desired answer), and so the force and violence of the image of brokenness is allayed. Thus it seems that more significant is the allusion to the broken speech of Pier della Vigna, which I have already considered as a linguistic symptom of infernal melancholia. Dante-pilgrim’s breaking of the branch is what releases Pier della Vigna’s broken speech: ‘de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme | parole e sangue’ (*Inf.*XIII.43–4). The ‘pensier’ of Petrarch’s poetic persona can more properly be said to be broken in a manner akin to that of the infernal suicides, as indicated by the use of the verb ‘romper’ (v. 14) with its textual echo of both ‘la scheggia rotta’ (*Inf.*XIII.43) and the ‘rotture sanguinenti in vano’ (v. 132), later in the same *canto*, of the anonymous Florentine suicide who, like Pier, also emits “‘con sangue doloroso sermo”’ (*Inf.*XIII.138). Further intertextual resonances confirm the pervasive undercurrent of *Inferno* XIII for this sonnet. Both Pier della Vigna and Petrarch present themselves as victims of fortune (*RVF* 124.1; *Inf.*XIII.98), and Petrarch’s expression of ‘invidia’ of ‘quei che son su l’altra riva’ (v. 4), itself as already noted a reference to *Inferno*, seems to continue after Pier’s death the ‘invidia’ (*Inf.*XIII.78) that led to Pier’s suicide in the first place.

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<sup>327</sup> Note to line 14, p. 571, in his edition of the *Canzoniere*.

The final line of Petrarch's sonnet equally encourages comparison with a sonnet from Dante's *Vita nuova*, which begins 'Tutti li miei pensier parlan d'Amore' (VN XIII, 8-9). Significantly, Dante's sonnet is one of confusion, doubt, fear, and instability, and results in a poetic impasse. In the words of the first tercet, 'io non so da qual matera prenda; | e vorrei dire, e non so ch'io mi dica: | così mi trovo in amorosa erranza!' (vv. 9-11). The strategy of quoting an *incipit* at the end of a poetic section is used by Petrarch to great effect in the *canzone* 'Lasso me' (RVF 70). At the end of RVF 124, by transforming Dante's opening line into a closing statement (repeating the phrase 'tutti miei pensier'), Petrarch strives to present himself as in a way pre-Dantean, since he situates his poem logically or linguistically before the start of Dante's. In the light of Petrarch's poem, it would appear that Dante starts where Petrarch leaves off, rather than vice versa.

The overall movement of Petrarch's sonnet through Dante's oeuvre from the *Commedia* to the *Vita nuova* thus enacts a backwards, retrograde reading of Dante which I would argue functions as a microcosm of Petrarch's engagement with his predecessor. While Dante is keen to portray his poetry as progressing in a linear fashion from the juvenile *Vita nuova*, which is 'fervida e passionata' in the words of the *Convivio*,<sup>328</sup> to the mature *summa* of the *Commedia* (not to mention his suppression of the pre-*Vita nuova* 'rime'),<sup>329</sup> Petrarch typically insists on subverting this order, not only in his focus on *Inferno* rather than on *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* (although that is not to say that these are not important intertexts for the *Canzoniere*), but also in his return to

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<sup>328</sup> *Convivio*, II, p. 6 (trattato primo, I, 16).

<sup>329</sup> That is to say, Dante's construction of the *Vita nuova* through putting older poems in this new context effectively erases their previous independent (and original) existence. For an edition that places emphasis on the poems' existence prior to and independent from the *Vita nuova*, see Dante, *Rime giovanili e della 'Vita nuova'*.

the *Vita nuova*.<sup>330</sup> Petrarch's reading of Dante is predicated, like his own memorialising, retrospective tendencies, upon a re-volt, that is, a turning back.

Petrarch's return to the *Vita nuova* is, nevertheless, a selective and adversarial approach, as I now investigate. Petrarch's debt to Dante's 'libello' is, first and foremost, a matter of structure: the careful, retrospective ordering of poems into a coherent narrative sequence. Yet even here matters are complicated by the notable formal dissimilarities between the two works. The *Vita nuova* as a prosimetrum allows for the narrative story and interpretation of events depicted in individual poems to be controlled by the parts in prose; the *Canzoniere* as a collection of poetry alone leaves the interpretation of the texts more open and the relationship between each poem ambiguous. Similarly, while the *Vita nuova* has a linear development, laid out by the prose, the temporality of the *Canzoniere* is much more complex and unstable. Petrarch's ordering of the poems may seem to impose a narrative on the collection, but this narrative remains implicit, blurred, and destabilised. While intertextual allusions within the *Canzoniere* may aid the establishing of narrative, the poems seem, rather, to repeat one another almost uncannily rather than constituting any possible development, particularly as the collection proceeds.<sup>331</sup> Speaking of the *Canzoniere*, then, as a sort of *Vita nuova* in verse only, has little sense, since the lack of prose has implications that are not easily overlooked. In the words of Germaine Warkentin, 'though it is usual to acknowledge the likeness between the two works, to call the *Canzoniere* as Adolfo Jenni does, "una seconda *Vita Nuova*

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<sup>330</sup> Much has also been written on the importance of Dante's *rime petrose* for Petrarch. See, for instance, Domenico De Robertis, 'Petrarca petroso', in *Il 'Canzoniere' di Francesco Petrarca: La critica contemporanea*, pp. 203-50; Claudio G. Antonio, 'Esperienze stilistiche petrose da Dante a Petrarca', *Modern Language Studies*, 13:2 (Spring 1983), 21-33; Ferdinando Neri, 'Il Petrarca e le rime dantesche della pietra', in *Saggi*, ed. by Remo Ceserani (Milan: Bompiani, 1964), pp. 155-73. While I do not address this topic here, it is worthwhile noting that such a pre-eminence likewise supports my argument of Petrarch as privileging the early over the later Dante.

<sup>331</sup> See Royle, *The Uncanny*, and, on the encouragement of narrative in the first half of the *Canzoniere* and its abolition in the second half, Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, pp. 193-223.

(ma per quasi tutta una vita) interamente in versi”, this brief statement alone contains two qualifications, one about content and the other about form, which positively demand that we confront not the resemblances between the two works, but their obvious differences.<sup>332</sup> Notably, Petrarch reverses the formal innovation of the *Vita nuova*, and places its narrative impulse in constant jeopardy. Some structural parallels between the two works remain, however, unavoidable, particularly since the central, overwhelming event of each text is the death (or, in more Dantean terminology, the ‘going to Heaven’) of the loved lady, and a certain language of grief is shared by the two poets. Indeed, as critics have already observed, there are notable intertextual recollections of the *canzone* Dante writes after Beatrice’s death (‘Li occhi dolenti’, VN XXXII) in Petrarch’s own *canzone* which treats the death of Laura (‘Che debb’io far?’, RVF 268).<sup>333</sup>

Anachronistically, Robert Pogue Harrison has even described the poems Dante writes after the death of Beatrice (in particular, ‘Li occhi dolenti’, and the two poems written partly, it is claimed, at the behest of Beatrice’s brother, ‘Venite a intender li sospiri miei’, VN XXXII, and ‘Quantunque volte, lasso!’, VN XXXIII) as embodying a ‘Petrarchan alternative’ of ‘constituting lyric presence through the relentless poetic lament of absence’.<sup>334</sup> Natalino Sapegno, similarly, considers ‘Li occhi dolenti’ as ‘già

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<sup>332</sup> See Warkentin, ‘The Form of Dante’s “Libello” and its Challenge to Petrarch’, *Quaderni d’Italianistica*, 2:2 (Autumn 1981), 160–70 (p. 160). The quotation from Jenni is to be found in ‘Un sistema del Petrarca dell’ordinamento del *Canzoniere*’, in *Studi in onore di Alberto Chiari*, 2 vols (Brescia: Paideia, 1973), II, pp. 721–32 (p. 721).

<sup>333</sup> See, for instance, Rosanna Bettarini, *Lacrime e inchiostro nel ‘Canzoniere’ di Petrarca* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1998), pp. 45–59. That ‘Li occhi dolenti’ also contains important echoes of ‘Donne ch’avete’ is generally accepted, and noted, for instance, by Guglielmo Gorni in *Il nodo della lingua e il verbo d’amore: Studi su Dante e altri duecentisti* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1981), p. 153. Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde similarly comment that ‘Li occhi dolenti’ is, like ‘Donne ch’avete’, ‘a praise poem – as indeed a *planctus* should be’, *Dante’s Lyric Poetry*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), II, p. 132.

<sup>334</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Body of Beatrice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 100.

quasi petrarchesca'.<sup>335</sup> Yet it is crucial that this 'Petrarchan alternative' is an option with which Dante toys, but which is then set aside, like so many of the stylistic poetic avenues explored and then abandoned in the *Vita nuova*. What for Petrarch is a lifelong commitment to writing poems lamenting Laura's absence is for Dante only a temporary waypoint on his journey of poetic self-discovery and linguistic experimentation. Thus, while I endorse a recognition of the influence of 'Li occhi dolenti' in the *Canzoniere* and pursue such a reading here, I wish to stress that – as I subsequently elucidate – Petrarch's poetry is in most other respects curiously at odds with the *Vita nuova*.

After the death of Beatrice and Laura respectively, the protagonists of the *Canzoniere* and the *Vita nuova* are forced to confront questions regarding the role writing plays in the experience of grief, and most acutely the question of what might be the purpose and value of writing in such a situation. To borrow Petrarch's own words, each poet is forced to ask 'il lamentar che vale?' (132.6). Such a question is vital to an understanding of the role of language in mourning and melancholia, and two very different answers are given by Petrarch and Dante, as we shall see. In Dante, the Petrarchan answer given at one point in the *Vita nuova* – the moment of writing the canzone 'Li occhi dolenti' – is overturned not only by the *Commedia* but by the end of the 'libello' itself.

The noted Petrarchan feel of the poems written after Beatrice's death seems to lie in their source of inspiration found in grief and suffering: 'Poi che li miei occhi ebbero per alquanto tempo lagrimato, e tanto affaticati erano che non poteano disfogare la mia tristizia, pensai di volere disfogarla con alquante parole dolorose' (VN xxxi, 1). The ensuing canzone, 'Li occhi dolenti', is, likewise, considered a means to 'sfogar lo

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<sup>335</sup> Natalino Sapegno, *Storia letteraria del trecento* (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1963), p. 48.

dolore' (v. 4), and has been appropriately described as 'un modello esaustivo di stile "doloroso"'.<sup>336</sup> Yet the notion of consolation or relief through speech, identified as the original impetus of 'Li occhi dolenti', is undercut, in hindsight, by the use of language which is retrospectively classifiable as infernal and therefore precisely not cathartic or consolatory. Dante's definition of his writing, 'convenemi parlar traendo guai' (v. 6), can, for instance, be heard retrospectively to contain echoes of the 'ombre' of *Inferno* V who also appear 'traendo guai' (v. 48). The end of the canzone appears to confirm such a bleak interpretation, since the poem is in the last line addressed as 'disconsolata' (v. 76). As in *Inferno*, speech in this canzone is painful and forced out amidst tears and sighs, while the *congedo* is strikingly bleak, with seemingly no progress, reassurance, or consolation brought about by the act of penning a description of this torment.

In this way Dante implicitly employs *Inferno* V not only to condemn a certain type of poetry represented by Francesca's speech to Dante (identifiable as Cavalcantian in style and substance),<sup>337</sup> but also to mark, retrospectively, the melancholic poetry written after Beatrice's death as infernal, as a poetic impasse. Dante's complaint in 'Li occhi dolenti', that his suffering 'a la morte mi mena' (v. 5) resonates with the sinful passivity of the lustful who are carried along by strong winds ('quel fiato [...] li mena', *Inf.*V.42-3) and with Francesca's specific complaint, "'Amor condusse noi ad una morte'" (*Inf.*V.106). Furthermore, Beatrice's body is described as 'la sua bella persona' in 'Li occhi dolenti' (v. 29), while Francesca will describe Paolo's falling in love with her "'bella persona'" (*Inf.*V.101), a retrospective reminder of the dangers of a love rooted in physical presence. In 'Li occhi dolenti' Dante continues with the admonition to the

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<sup>336</sup> Mario Pazzaglia, 'Li occhi dolenti per pietà del core', in *ED*, III, pp. 665-6 (p. 666).

<sup>337</sup> See Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, pp. 70-101, and Gennaro Sasso, *Dante, Guido e Francesca* (Rome: Viella, 2008).

reader ‘Chi no la piange, quando ne ragiona, | core ha di pietra’, a phrase which also finds its counterpart in *Inferno*, this time in Ugolino’s question “‘se non piangi, di che pianger suoli?’” (*Inf.XXXIII.42*), which contrasts with his own stony-hearted reaction of “‘Io non piangëa, sì dentro impetrai’” (*Inf.XXXIII.49*). This further emphasises the proleptically infernal nature of Dante’s poetic voice at this point, which aims to produce the same effect on the reader as the stories related by the damned souls will later produce on Dante-pilgrim in the *Commedia*.

From the perspective of Dante’s retrospective condemnation of the poetry of lament represented by ‘Li occhi dolenti’, it is fascinating that Petrarch should choose to return (re-volt) to this poetic nexus as if in an attempt, however unstable, to rehabilitate Francesca’s language as a poetic model rather than an example of the sin of lust. Petrarch’s admiration for and return to *Inferno* V has been widely recognised and catalogued.<sup>338</sup> In the words of Michele Feo, ‘il Petrarca non sembra essersi mai liberato’ from the ‘incantamento’ of Francesca.<sup>339</sup> This return is also corroborated by Barolini who notes that ‘Petrarch forged his identity against Dante’s by going back to the courtly paradigm that Dante inherited, theologized, and then ultimately abandoned’.<sup>340</sup> Suffice it to mention here but a few examples of Francesca’s enduring seductiveness for Petrarch, principally with reference to *RVF* 12, which explicitly echoes *Inferno* V in terms of shared vocabulary and rhyme words. For instance, “‘O anime affannate’” (*Inf.V.80*) is

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<sup>338</sup> See Marco Santagata, *Per moderne carte: La biblioteca volgare del Petrarca* (Bologna: Mulino, 1990), pp. 60–7; Peter Kuon, *L’aura dantesca*, pp. 57–83; Tiziano Zanato, ‘San Francesco, Pier delle Vigne e Francesca da Rimini nei “Rerum vulgarium fragmenta”’, *Filologia e critica*, 2 (1977), 177–216; Michel David, ‘Une réminiscence de Dante dans un sonnet de Pétrarque (*Inferno* V – *RVF* 8)’, *Revue des études italiennes*, n.s., 29 (1983), 186–8.

<sup>339</sup> Michele Feo, ‘L’ombra di Dante’, in *Il ‘Canzoniere’ di Francesco Petrarca: La critica contemporanea*, pp. 251–75 (p. 265). See also his entry for ‘Petrarca’ in *ED*, IV, pp. 450–8.

<sup>340</sup> Barolini, ‘The Self in the Labyrinth of Time (*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*)’, in *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. by Victoria Kirkham and Armando Maggi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 33–62.

recalled in Petrarch in the noun ‘affanni’ (12.2), and ‘tormento’ is more straightforwardly common to both texts (*Inf*.v.37 and 12.1). Furthermore, the rhyme sequence martiri: desiri: sospiri (12.10, 12, 14) follows that of Dante-pilgrim’s speech to Francesca (martiri: sospiri: disiri, *Inf*.v.116, 118, 120), while the rhyming pair ‘dolore’ and ‘amore’ is also notable (12.9 and 13; *Inf*.v.119 and 121). Crucially, Petrarch seems to identify with both Francesca and Dante-pilgrim, that is, with both the suffering subject and the sympathetic observer, so that Dante-pilgrim’s pity for Francesca tends to be transformed into self-pity. Dante-pilgrim’s response to Francesca, “‘Francesca, i tuoi martiri | a lagrimar mi fanno tristo e pio’” (*Inf*.v.116–17) is echoed by Petrarch’s lyric subject in the lines ‘ne’ miei danni | a’llamentar mi fa pauroso e lento’ (12.7–8). Yet Petrarch’s rehabilitation of Francesca remains an attempt that is fraught with guilt and self-condemnation. Much as Petrarch might like to, he can never shake off the moral associations of the infernal story.

In this manner Petrarch continues to attempt to rescue Francesca from Hell and re-establish her story as a noble, literary archetype of the earthly experience of love, whilst also sounding warning notes about such an enterprise. Petrarch appears to endorse Francesca’s axiomatic amorous manifesto, beginning “‘Amor, ch’al cor gentil ratto s’apprende’” (*Inf*.v.100), for instance similarly speaking of ‘Amor che solo i cor’ leggiadri invessa’ (165.5). Francesca’s following two statements (“‘Amor, ch’a nullo amato amar perdona’” and “‘Amor condusse noi ad una morte’”, *Inf*.v.103 and 106) are also perhaps conflated into one in Petrarch in the lines ‘Lasso, ben so che dolorose prede | di noi fa quella ch’a nullo huom perdona’ (101.1–2), where ‘quella’ is ‘la morte’ rather than love, thereby suggesting that the two are interchangeable. Moreover, more generally, much of Petrarch’s poetry is placed under the Franciscan sign of the pain of

memory, epitomised by the famous lines: “‘Nessun maggior dolore | che ricordarsi del tempo felice | ne la miseria’” (*Inf*.v.121-3). These lines are explicitly echoed, for instance, in Petrarch’s phrase ‘con dolor rimembrando il tempo lieto’ (332.27).

Petrarch’s attempt to reverse Dante’s moral condemnation of the poetic language of *Inferno* v is consistent with his modelling of the *canzone* on Laura’s death, ‘Che debb’io far?’, on ‘Li occhi dolenti’, a poem which following the example of the Dante of the *Commedia* ought to have been rejected as at least in part a wrong turn linguistically and emotionally. Both *canzoni* underline the precariousness of seeking to render one’s beloved present through poetry and question the efficacy of writing to console. In ‘Li occhi dolenti’, writing is briefly presented as a source of comfort: ‘Poscia piangendo, sol nel mio lamento | chiamo Beatrice, e dico: “Or se’ tu morta?”; | e mentre ch’io la chiamo, me conforta’ (vv. 54-6, *VN* XXXI, 14). Yet here, as Francesca Southerden rightly notes, ‘although the poet gains comfort from calling Beatrice’s name, the consolation lasts only as long as the utterance’;<sup>341</sup> the end of the poem underscores how fleeting such comfort is, as the *canzone* outlasts the consolation sought in the invocation of the name of the poet’s beloved. In the words of the closing line of one of Petrarch’s *ballate*, poetry provides only ‘breve conforto a sì lungo martiro’ (14.14).

This situation is replicated in Petrarch’s ‘Che debb’io far?’: ‘piangendo la richiamo: | questo m’avanza di cotanta spene, | et questo solo anchor qui mi mantene’ (268.30-2). This persistent presentation of poetry as painful and ultimately unable to console reveals the intimate connection between Dante’s *canzone*, Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, and *Inferno* more generally. At points, Petrarch does hope that writing will aid him to ‘sfogare’, relieve, his pain (e.g. 252.1-3; 293.10; 344.13-14), but this is

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<sup>341</sup> Southerden, ‘Lost for Words’, p. 201.

crucially an attempt and not a certainty: ‘cerco parlando d’allentar mia pena’ (276.4). Instead, many of Petrarch’s poems end with a lack of consolation which renders them akin to Dante’s ‘Li occhi dolenti’ (e.g. 276.12, ‘sconsolato e cieco’). Indeed, the last line of *RVF* 268 specifically echoes the close of ‘Li occhi dolenti’ with the description of the poem as ‘vedova sconsolata in veste negra’ (v. 82). In the second stanza of *canzone* 73, Petrarch dismisses his past belief in poetry as providing ‘qualche breve riposo et qualche triegua’ (v. 18) and instead sees the desire to write as uncontrollable and self-perpetuating: ‘continuando l’amorose note | sì possente è ’l voler che mi trasporta’ (vv. 23–4). In this sense, Petrarch’s writing is endless, uncathartic, and unresolved, as Barolini has explored.<sup>342</sup>

In fact, Petrarch often accuses poetry of increasing rather than decreasing his suffering, as at the close of *RVF* 71, where the poet addresses his creation complaining ‘Canzon, tu non m’acqueti, anzi m’inflammì’ (71.106). The opening stanza of sonnet 273 makes a similar complaint:

Che fai? che pensi? che pur dietro guardi  
nel tempo, che tornar non pote ormai?  
Anima sconsolata, che pur vai  
giugnendo legno al foco ove tu ardi?                   (273.1–4)

Here, memory and poetry are both associated with an Orphic, backwards-looking glance which fuels the poet’s passion and if anything, if possible, worsens the state of the ‘Anima sconsolata’ (v. 3). The sestet opens with the Ugolino-like plea ‘Deh non rinovellar quel che n’ancide’ (v. 9), which suggests that his poetry has a self-torturing, repetitive element elsewhere ascribed to memory which ‘ad ognor fresca et salda’ his

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<sup>342</sup> Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, pp. 193–223. Barolini discusses how in the sequence *RVF* 71–73 each *canzone* in turn resists closure and resolution, thereby establishing a poetics of incompletion and ceaseless tension. These comments are explored further in the Epilogue in relation to the form of the *Canzoniere* as a whole.

love for Laura (175.13). This evidence of the inability of language to console taken from Petrarch's vernacular poetry contrasts with the general picture drawn from Petrarch's Latin works which suggests that he did see writing as providing consolation.<sup>343</sup> From this Latinate point of view, Petrarch's much discussed humanism lies precisely in his faith in the consoling power of words. In the *Canzoniere*, however, a bleaker version of events is envisaged that contradicts the humanistic belief in the possibility of finding consolation through language and instead voices the endless laments of an irredeemable 'alma sconsolata' (37.60).<sup>344</sup>

The necessity of repetitive speech despite its lack of productivity aligns Petrarch's poetic voice with that of the infernal souls' 'infiniti guai' (*Inf.IV.9*), a phrase which Petrarch applies to his own poetry (355.11). The 'pianti vani' (*Inf.XXI.5*) of the damned souls are also echoed in the 'van dolore' of Petrarch's opening sonnet (1.6). The answer to the questions of one critic, 'Perché "van dolore"? Perché sarebbe un dolore frivolo o semplicemente sprecato? Esiste un dolore che si possa considerare poetico o utile?',<sup>345</sup> can thus be sought in the distinction between infernal and purgatorial suffering outlined in the previous chapter, with the caveat that while purgatorial suffering may be 'utile' morally, infernal suffering is not less 'poetico' for being 'inutile'.

Petrarch's refutation of sublimation and assertion that art is a continuation rather than a transcendence of desire can be interestingly illuminated by the psychoanalytical

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<sup>343</sup> See George W. McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 18–72, and his 'Healing Eloquence: Petrarch, Salutati, and the Physicians', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 15:2 (Autumn 1985), 317–46.

<sup>344</sup> Importantly, however, Gur Zak has shown how the ambiguity towards the role of writing audible in the *Canzoniere* is also a feature of Petrarch's Latin works. See his *Petrarch's Humanism and the Care of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>345</sup> Paolo Cherchi, *Verso la chiusura: Saggio sul 'Canzoniere' di Petrarca* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), p. 81.

writing of Leo Bersani.<sup>346</sup> In his works, Bersani is consistently dismissive of the ‘fundamental myth of Western culture’ that ‘art sublimates [that is, transcends or redeems] suffering’.<sup>347</sup> Instead, he sees the sublimation of experience into art, prevalent in what he calls a ‘culture of redemption’,<sup>348</sup> as unfair to the richness and complexities of both art and experience. Thus he explores in *The Freudian Body* the possibility of:

A view of cultural symbolization as a continuation rather than repressive substitute for sexual fantasy. Or, in other terms, [...] a view of sublimation as coextensive with sexuality, as an appropriation and elaboration of sexual impulses rather than as a special form of renunciation of such impulses.<sup>349</sup>

From this perspective, ‘sublimation is not a transcendence of desire, but rather a kind of extending of desire’; it should be viewed ‘not as a mechanism by which desire is denied, but rather as a self-reflexive activity by which desire multiplies and diversifies its representations’.<sup>350</sup>

These assertions provide an apt commentary on the force at work in Petrarch’s poetry both in terms of content and form; the sublimatory act of writing is a continuation and perpetuation of desire, and therefore also of grief.<sup>351</sup> As Southerden confirms, writing is a means for Petrarch of ‘reinstating and extending the *dolor* rather than relieving it’.<sup>352</sup> It seems, then, reductive and perhaps even banal to imagine that

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<sup>346</sup> A similar use of Bersanian sublimation to read another writer – Pasolini – who is also engaged in a project of rewriting Dante is undertaken by Gagnolati: see ‘Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Queer Performance: *La Divina Mimesis* between Dante and *Petrolio*’, in *Corpus XXX: Pasolini, Petrolio, Salò*, ed. by Davide Messina (Bologna: CLUEB, 2012), pp. 134–64, and *Amor che move: Linguaggio del corpo e forma del desiderio in Dante, Pasolini e Morante*.

<sup>347</sup> Leo Bersani, *Baudelaire and Freud* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 25.

<sup>348</sup> See *The Culture of Redemption*.

<sup>349</sup> Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 45.

<sup>350</sup> *The Freudian Body*, pp. 47 and 49.

<sup>351</sup> In the Epilogue, I consider at greater length the mutually formative interplay between literary structure and the thematic material of interminable mourning, or sublimation as an extension rather than a transcendence of desire.

<sup>352</sup> Southerden, ‘Desire as a Dead Letter: A Reading of Petrarch’s *RVF* 125’, in *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages*, ed. by Manuele Gagnolati, Tristan Kay, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca Southerden (Oxford: Legenda, 2012), pp. 185–207 (p. 195).

works of literature, such as Petrarch's lyric collection, should function as a sort of 'writing cure'<sup>353</sup> analogous to the 'talking cure' of psychoanalysis. In Petrarch, the incurable wound of melancholia that defines his love for Laura not only after her death but already during her lifetime is, rather than healed, kept open and painful through the endless act of writing. Petrarch's poetic language is evidently, from this perspective, very different in its aims from the collective, liturgical, therapeutic language of *Purgatorio*. Instead, it presents the reader with what I would call an example of 'melancholic performativity',<sup>354</sup> that is, of a lone voice for whom the act of speaking produces a deterioration in their emotional state and words such as 'piango' and 'sospiro' represent and act as an incitement to perform the very action they describe. The distinction between Dantean and Petrarchan performativity is helpfully elucidated by Southerden (with the final *canti* of *Purgatorio* and *RVF* 126 particularly in mind):

Where Dante's performative strategies are used linguistically to stage a new version of the self and to redefine the boundaries of poetic discourse, giving the language of the *Commedia* the redemptive power of the sacraments, Petrarch's language is used instead to cultivate his pleasure in the sin of recollection, which the poem 'performs' without ever 'transforming' the 'I'.<sup>355</sup>

The idea of Petrarchan melancholic performativity is predicated on a similar recognition that poetic language might constitute a successful performance (of desire, memory, or grief), while failing to afford a Dantean transformation or conversion.

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<sup>353</sup> The phrase is used by Jonathan Bate in *The Cure for Love* (London: Picador, 1998), p. 101. This novel explores the possibility that psychoanalysis could rely on written rather than spoken language, and so in this sense the term 'writing cure' is appropriate and literal.

<sup>354</sup> Austin himself in *How to Do Things with Words* never made such distinctions, since for him there is naturally no moral or emotional attachment to the notion of performativity, so that the performative verbs 'to bless' and 'to curse', for example, are indistinguishable in their grammatical function. He does categorise performatives as either 'happy' ('felicitous') or 'unhappy' ('infelicitous') but this relates to their success: an 'unhappy' performative is a failed one and a 'happy' performative a successful one (see, in particular, pp. 14, 54). Pertinently, Austin warns his reader, 'That an act is happy or felicitous in all our ways does not exempt it from all criticism' (p. 42). Derrida, similarly, glosses the term 'felicitous' as follows: '« felicitous » – ce qui veut dire, dans ce code, efficace, productif, efficient, générateur de l'événement escompté, mais parfois tout sauf « heureux »'. *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre ou la prothèse d'origine* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), pp. 45–6.

<sup>355</sup> Francesca Southerden, 'Performative Desires: Sereni's Re-staging of Dante and Petrarch', in *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, pp. 165–96 (p. 183).

Following Bersani's reinterpretation of sublimation as an extension rather than a transcendence of desire, we might redefine the performativity of language, with Petrarch in mind, as fuelling rather than – as in *Purgatorio* – correcting desire. In contrast to the collective cure of purgatorial performativity, through which desire is sublimated in the traditional sense (that is, transcended), in Petrarch a melancholic performativity can be posited in which language serves the perpetuation of desire, or sublimation in Bersani's version. Petrarch's own answer to the question he poses himself, 'se mie rime alcuna cosa ponno' (327.12), concerns the power of his language to provide Laura with immortality on Earth ('consecrata fra i nobili intellecti | fia del tuo nome qui memoria eterna', vv. 13-14). To this achievement of his poetry must undoubtedly be added the performance of melancholia, that is, the endless renewal of grief through language and memory. The poet's declaration that 'il desir mi mena | a dire' (125.43-4) is easily reversible to 'il dir mi mena a desir', where the act of both writing and desiring are considered melancholically endless. (In the Epilogue, which brings to the fore a discussion of Dante's *Vita nuova*, I return to the *Canzoniere* in order to consider further the implications of the discovery in this chapter of Bersani's non-transcendental version of sublimation as regards the collection's macrostructure.)

The matter of the consolatory power of poetic language central to the *Vita nuova*, the *Commedia*, and the *Canzoniere* ultimately raises the question of how the two poets regard the function of writing. We have seen that in *Inferno* the language of the damned souls' self-involved narratives functions only in a descriptive manner, and brings about no change or reprieve from suffering. In *Purgatorio*, however, language is productive, useful, and progressive, that is performative and transformative. Yet in Dante's earlier *Vita nuova* there is a momentarily strong poetic strand of pessimism and a

lack of catharsis epitomised in the poetry immediately following Beatrice's death. This poetic strand seems to be retrospectively labelled in Dante's mind as infernal, given his subsequent poetic borrowings from poems such as 'Li occhi dolenti' in key passages from *Inferno*. It is this melancholic, infernal model that Petrarch associates himself with in the *Canzoniere*.

Of course, as I have already intimated, this pessimistic strand of poetry in the *Vita nuova* is far from the whole story, and so it is imperative at this juncture to examine more fully the ways in which Dante's 'libello' is, despite striking points of resonance, worlds apart from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. In this way Petrarch's un-Dantean melancholia becomes clearer. Even before *Inferno*, the *Vita nuova* itself moves beyond the language of melancholia encapsulated in 'Li occhi dolenti'. As I explore in the Epilogue, the close of the *Vita nuova* enacts a triumph over, not of, melancholia (particularly in contrast with the Proustian 'intermittences du cœur'). Indeed, even in 'Li occhi dolenti' itself, strong hints of an un-melancholic resolution are apparent, and the tendency to overlook such aspects in favour of more doleful expressions is no doubt testimony to the success of Petrarch's borrowings from this poem, which lead the reader in hindsight to focus more on its darker, 'Petrarchan' side.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the *Vita nuova* and Petrarch's *Canzoniere* is to be located in the representation of the deaths of Laura and Beatrice. Dante, as Fabio Camilletti has highlighted, particularly in the prose, avoids using the words 'morte' or 'morta' in relationship to Beatrice's demise, preferring to speak of her 'partita da noi' (VN XXVIII, 2) or, rather than the anniversary of her death, of the anniversary of the day when 'questa donna era fatta de li cittadini di vita eterna' (VN

XXXIV, 1).<sup>356</sup> Fittingly, Beatrice is first introduced in the ‘libello’ as ‘la gloriosa donna’ (VN II, 1), which from the very start draws attention to her heavenly beatitude and attempts to deflect any worries about her mortality.<sup>357</sup> Similarly, even within ‘Li occhi dolenti’ (VN XXXI), the language of grief is mitigated by an insistence that in fact Beatrice is not dead, but ‘se n’è gita in ciel subitamente’ (v. 13), and in this ‘ciel’ she is, it is reiterated, ‘gloriosa’ (v. 31). Such descriptions are intended not as euphemisms, but as the actual state of affairs. Beatrice has ascended to Heaven, and while this is not proposed as a bodily assumption, which would be heretical (it is noted in ‘Li occhi dolenti’ that ‘Partissi della sua bella persona’, v. 29), no further thought is given in the *Vita nuova* to her earthly remains, not to mention any place of burial.

After Beatrice’s death, words such as ‘corpo’ and ‘terra’ are wholly absent from the text, marking a progression and distinct change in tone from the prose narrative and the subsequent *canzone*, ‘Donna pietosa’, where a plainer vocabulary of death is used. At this earlier point in the ‘libello’, Dante is told that “‘Di necessitate convene che la gentilissima Beatrice alcuna volta si muoia’” (VN XXIII, 3) and then that “‘Morta è la donna tua’” (‘Li occhi dolenti’, v. 56), and he even imagines that he is able to see Beatrice’s dead body (“‘morta giace’” VN XXIII, 8). It is this emphasis on the corporeal and the mortal which perhaps explains why Dante-narrator is so keen in the prose before and after the *canzone* to stress that this episode is a ‘fallace imaginare’ and a ‘vana fantasia’ (VN XXIII, 15 and 29). The more mature author of the prose gloss thereby

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<sup>356</sup> Fabio Camilletti, ‘Dante Painting an Angel: Image-making, Double-oriented Sonnets and Dissemblance in *Vita nuova* XXXIV’, in *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages*, pp. 71–84 (p. 75). This is not to say that other characters, such as Beatrice’s brother, do not refer to her death, nor that before her death the word ‘morta’ is not present in anticipation.

<sup>357</sup> See Charles S. Singleton’s comments in *An Essay on the ‘Vita nuova’* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 7: ‘To a reader in Dante’s time it would have been clear from the first words of the book that Beatrice was already dead at the time this was written. [...] [T]he word [‘gloriosa’] says that, when the author begins his book, Beatrice is already in the glory of eternal life.’

appears to reject the fears of his younger poetic self, and this rejection is consonant with the later language associated with Beatrice's actual death, where words such as 'morta' are banished in favour of a celestially orientated semantic field. Such an interpretation is supported by Natascia Tonelli's analysis of *VN* XXIII as staging the protagonist's succumbing to melancholia in the rigorously medieval, scientific, technical sense of the word (relating to the theory of the four humours, where melancholia is caused by an excess of black bile, and indicated by fear, sadness, and false imaginings), and which Tonelli situates alongside Dante's exclusion from the *Vita nuova* of the sonnet 'Un dì si venne a me Malinconia'.<sup>358</sup> The more mature Dante's presentation of the melancholic 'Donna pietosa' and surrounding prose as ultimately a poetic dead end is consonant with this suppression from the 'libello' of the poem in which *Malinconia* actually appears.

In contrast, Petrarch announces Laura's death emphatically, after a series of anticipatory hints and warnings, as 'Madonna è morta' (268.4). Interestingly, this line is a later revision to the *canzone*, in an aim to render the poem *satis triste*, 'sufficiently sad',<sup>359</sup> as if following a command analogous to that of one of Julian Barnes's narrators: 'Use the short, simple, true words. *Dead*, I say, and *dying*'.<sup>360</sup> This later alteration to *RVF* 268 suggests on the one hand that this stark un-Dantean turn of phrase was decided upon slowly or at first reluctantly, and on the other that Dante's language might have been considered by Petrarch as not grief-stricken enough. Such an interpretation is supported by the fact that the original and subsequently rejected opening lines of the *canzone*, and which were castigated as *non satis triste principium*, 'not a sad enough

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<sup>358</sup> Natascia Tonelli, 'Stilistica della malinconia: *Vita Nova* XXII-XXV e *Un dì si venne a me Malinconia*', *Tenzone*, 4 (2003), 241-63.

<sup>359</sup> See Fredi Chiappelli, 'Non satis triste principium', *Versants*, 7 (1985), 3-14.

<sup>360</sup> Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot* (London: Picador, 2002), p. 102. Similarly, in Barnes, *Levels of Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2013), p. 71, it is declared 'only the old words would do: death, grief, sorrow, sadness, heartbreak.'

start', in an autograph marginal note, included the line 'è oscurato il sole agli occhi miei' (v. 3). This line is not excluded wholly from *RVF* 268, but rather moved to a later point ('è scurato il sole', v. 17), and is more Dantean in tone, recalling as it does the depiction of the nightmarish anticipation of Beatrice's death from the *Vita nuova* (where the prose notes 'pareami vedere lo sole oscurare', *VN* XXIII, 5).<sup>361</sup> The same phrase is, nonetheless, reinstated by Petrarch as suitable for the start of a poem, a poem at that which continues in a manner highly reminiscent of Dante, as if to highlight further the image's echoes of the *Vita nuova*:

Occhi miei, oscurato è 'l nostro sole;  
anzi è salito al cielo, et ivi splende:  
ivi il vedremo anchora, ivi n'attende,  
et di nostro tardar forse li dole. (275.1-4)

For Petrarch, there remains an unresolved conflict between death and resurrection, and between Heaven and Earth that is absent from the Dantean model.<sup>362</sup> Petrarch's obsession with Laura's dead body (her 'bel corpo', 335.14) leads him to dwell on earthly matters in contrast to the ascensional, heavenly bent of Dante's thoughts after Beatrice's death (already in 'Donna pietosa', the final point of interest is Beatrice's 'anima bella', v. 83). If Laura is now in Heaven looking down with pity on the poet's suffering (and the uncertainty is never resolved), it is certain however that her body has been left behind on Earth.

Such a view of the divide between Petrarch and Dante is complicated by the end of *Purgatorio*, where Petrarch finds an unexpectedly rich source of language of the

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<sup>361</sup> The common intertext for Dante and Petrarch is from Luke 23:45, 'et obscuratus est sol', 'and the sun was darkened', in reference to Christ's passion, a phrase which adds a further echo beyond the Nervalian to Kristeva's choice of the title *Soleil noir*.

<sup>362</sup> It is important, however, to note that Beatrice, like the other souls in the *Commedia*, is situated in a space between human death and the final resurrection at the Last Judgement, even if this resurrection is, unlike in the world of the *Canzoniere*, assured in advance. See Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife*, and '(In-)Corporeality, Language, Performance in Dante's *Vita nuova* and *Commedia*', in *Dante's Plurilingualism*, pp. 211-22.

posthumous. At the end of *Purgatorio* XXX, Beatrice accuses Dante-pilgrim of infidelity to her after her death, with an explicit reference to the “vita nova” (v. 115). Significantly, Beatrice describes her own death not as an end but as, too, a new life, describing “mutai vita” (v. 125). She goes on to describe such a change as an increase in beauty, regardless of the separation from the body (‘carne’): “Quando di carne a spirto era salita, | e bellezza e virtù cresciuta m’era, | fu’ io a lui men cara e men gradita” (*Purg.*XXX.127-9). The anagrammatic relationship between ‘carne’ and ‘men cara’ highlights that Dante’s mistake was excessive attachment to Beatrice’s physical presence, for which he is here reproached. In the next *canto*, Beatrice continues her accusations, and returns to dwell on her “carne” which is now clarified as “sepolta” (*Purg.*XXXI.48), in a passage which I cited more fully at the end of Chapter One:

‘Mai non t’appresentò natura o arte  
piacer, quanto le belle membra in ch’io  
rinchiusa fui, e che so’ ’n terra sparte;  
e se ’l sommo piacer sì ti fallio  
per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale  
dovea poi trarre te nel suo disio?’ (*Purg.*XXXI.49-54)

This passage sounds, in retrospect, almost Petrarchan in its language, with phrases such as “belle membra”, “terra sparte”, and “cosa mortale” taken up obsessively in the *Canzoniere*’s lexical space (for instance, ‘belle membra’, 126.2, and ‘cosa mortale’, 365.2, not to mention the recurrent language of scattering throughout the ‘rime sparse’, from 1.1 onwards).<sup>363</sup> Beatrice has recourse to the plain language of death here (“la mia morte”), if only to emphasise the pointlessness of Dante seeking to find comfort for her “morte” in any other “cosa mortale” (v. 53).

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<sup>363</sup> On the importance of *Purgatorio* XXXI in Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, see Lombardi, “I desire therefore I am”, and Southerden, ‘Performative Desires’. Lombardi also notes in *The Wings of the Doves* how phrases from *Purg.*XXXI.49-54 are “resurrected” by Petrarca in his *Canzoniere*, pp. 138-9.

In *Purgatorio* XXXI, the lesson to be learnt from Beatrice's death is, seemingly, the fallibility of all that is beautiful, a lesson which is elegantly echoed in the closing line of the first sonnet of the *Canzoniere*, where it is stated 'che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno' (1.14). Yet this is only half the story, for *Purgatorio* XXX has already established that Beatrice's "bellezza" (v. 128), rather than being undone at her death, is in fact increased. The "belle membra" may be "'n terra sparte", but Beatrice's beauty is more than skin deep, as Dante-pilgrim rediscovers at the end of his trial when he finally dares to raise his eyes to Beatrice (*Purg.*XXXI.74-87 and 139-45). Moreover, as Solomon reminds Dante-pilgrim in *Paradiso* XIV, the joyously anticipated reunion with the body – "'la carne | che tutto dì la terra ricoperchia" (*Par.*XIV.56-7) and the 'corpi morti' of loved ones (*Par.*XIV.63)<sup>364</sup> – will increase the refulgent beauty of the blessed.

Nonetheless, while there is, undoubtedly, a Dantean source of inspiration for Petrarch's mortuary language after Laura's death, the ramifications are very different. For a start, in *Purgatorio* the language is used by Beatrice in front of Dante-pilgrim; allusions to her mortal remains in no way dim the beauty of her presence. In Petrarch, however, such words are uttered by the lyric subject in Laura's absence, and so are far more haunted and desperate. Moreover, Petrarch, unlike Dante-pilgrim, is incapable of detachment from Laura's body. Petrarch's obsessive return to Laura's graveside and her mortal remains seems positively necrophilic. He describes her body as covered by a 'picciol marmo' (304.9) and 'chiuso in poca fossa' (326.4), and laments that 'in pochi sassi | chiuse 'l mio lume e 'l suo carcer terrestre' (306.3-4) and that 'poca terra il mio ben preme' (331.47). He is also jealous of the possessiveness her grave can vaunt: 'Quanta invidia io ti porto, avara terra, | ch'abbracci quella cui veder m'è tolto' (300.1-

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<sup>364</sup> On this passage, see Gagnolati, 'Nostalgia in Heaven'.

2). The first quatrain of sonnet 333 represents the apotheosis of this strain of thought in Petrarch:

Ite, rime dolenti, al duro sasso  
che 'l mio caro thesoro in terra asconde,  
ivi chiamate chi dal ciel risponde,  
benché 'l mortal sia in loco oscuro et basso. (333.1-4)

The obsession with Laura's body is as intense after death as in life. In the octet of sonnet 292, the poet lists Laura's many beautiful features, with much reliance on polysyndeton ('Gli occhi [...] | et le braccia et le mani e i piedi e 'l viso', 'le crespe chiome [...] | e 'l lampeggiar de l'angelico riso', vv. 1-2 and 5-6), only to conclude in line eight, with a shocking syntactical effect of deflation and sudden collapse, 'poca polvere son, che nulla sente'.

The soul-body dichotomy across which Laura is divided leads to this alternating vision of Laura's final resting place, either on Earth or in Heaven. For instance, most of *RVF* 270 ('Amor, se vuo' ch'i' torni al giogo antico') voices the poet's grief that 'Il mio amato tesoro in terra trova' (270.5) and that 'l mio primo amor terra ricopre' (270.45), yet the *congedo* marks a sudden switch in tone and emphasis, informing the reader instead that in fact 'quella che fu mia donna al ciel è gita' (270.107). This irresolvable conflict is encapsulated in a line describing Laura: 'la vera è sotterra, anzi è nel cielo' (277.10). The reader is forced to wonder how the 'anzi' functions syntactically here, as it seems to create an unsteady U-turn in the sentence, while masquerading as a logical adverbial progression.<sup>365</sup> The phrase raises the question who the real, true ('la vera') Laura is for Petrarch, whether her body or her soul. The close of the *Canzoniere* leans towards the former answer, with its reduction of Laura in the final *canzone* in particular

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<sup>365</sup> Lombardi has described the 'anzi' in such situations as perhaps even ironic, "'I desire therefore I am'", p. 8.

to ‘Mortal bellezza’ and ‘poca mortal terra caduca’ (366.85 and 121), in contrast to Dante’s focus on Beatrice’s ‘spirital bellezza’ (‘Quantunque volte, lasso!’, v. 22, *VN* XXXIII, 8). In this respect the *Canzoniere* ends in a manner wholly ‘antithetical to’ and ‘deliberately divergent’<sup>366</sup> from the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia*, even if glimmers of a more beatific Laura prior to the collection’s conclusion can never be absolutely discounted. While Laura appears to be ultimately a ‘cosa mortale’ (365.2) for the poet of the *Canzoniere*, Beatrice can be spoken of as a *cosa immortale* even before the *Commedia*. In the *Vita nuova*, she is already described as ‘cosa nova’ (‘Donne ch’avete’, v. 46, *VN* XIX, in contrast to the “‘Cosa mortale’” of v. 43), ‘una cosa venuta | da cielo in terra a miracol mostrare’ (‘Tanto gentile e tanto onesta’, vv. 7–8, *VN* XXVI), and, after her death, simply as ‘uno nove, cioè uno miracolo’ (*VN* XXIX, 3).<sup>367</sup> In the *Commedia*, as already discussed, Beatrice exhorts Dante-pilgrim to turn his gaze away from any “‘cosa mortale’” (*Purg.*XXXI.53); this turning away from mortal things is not a move that Petrarch’s lyric subject ever fully achieves or even desires to achieve fully.

Associated with Petrarch’s fixation on Laura’s body is his definition of love itself as wholly sensual, as an experience in which ‘regnano i sensi, et la ragion è morta’ (211.7). In this respect, the *Canzoniere* is again dissimilar to the *Vita nuova*, where Dante takes great pains to emphasise the conjunction of love and reason, with the former reliant on rather than at odds with ‘lo fedele consiglio de la ragione’ (*VN* II, 9). Petrarch’s disassociation of love and reason, for instance in his assertion that “l fren de la

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<sup>366</sup> See Sara Sturm-Maddox, ‘Transformations of Courtly Love Poetry: *Vita nuova* and *Canzoniere*’, in *The Expansion and Transformations of Courtly Literature*, ed. by Nathaniel B. Smith and Joseph T. Snow (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), pp. 128–40 (p. 136), and also *Petrarch’s Metamorphoses: Text and Subtext in the ‘Rime sparse’* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), pp. 39–64.

<sup>367</sup> For Dante, the number nine signifies a miracle because it is three times itself (with the number three symbolising the Trinity). See Carlo Vecce, “‘Ella era uno nove, cioè uno miracolo’” (*V.N.*, XXIX, 3): Il numero di Beatrice’, in *La gloriosa donna de la mente: A Commentary on the ‘Vita nuova’*, ed. by Vincent Moleta (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1994), pp. 161–79.

ragion Amor non prezza' (141.7), is a further indication of the *Canzoniere's* repeated and deliberate self-positioning as precisely not another *Vita nuova*, despite the important structural, thematic, and linguistic role Dante's 'libello' does play in Petrarch's poetic collection. Apparent further differences between the *Vita nuova* and the *Canzoniere* will become clearer when I return to the 'libello' in the Epilogue.

Petrarch, therefore, as I have shown, can be said to rewrite Dante in a minor key, returning as he does to moments of endless grief from *Inferno* and the *Vita nuova* and choosing to ignore or subvert the ways in which Dante himself goes beyond these poetic impasses. For Dante the linguistic model valorised in *Purgatorio* enables a coming to terms with loss and a successful conclusion to the work of mourning. For Petrarch, however, language serves instead to prolong mourning and thus acts as a catalyst for and a record of melancholia. Petrarch's poetry is both a result of and an incitement to interminable mourning. While in *Purgatorio* language brings an end to mourning, in the *Canzoniere* the act of writing poetry and making obsessive revisions to this poetry is a way to render the state of mourning permanent and endless, that is, melancholic. In this project of sustaining grief through poetry, Petrarch returns to a particular moment of the *Vita nuova* where a similar enterprise seems to erupt momentarily into the narrative of Beatrice's beatitude: the *canzone* 'Li occhi dolenti'. For Petrarch, Dante's final answer to the question of how one should react to the death of the beloved remains unsatisfactory. The Dante of the *Commedia* triumphantly portrays poetry and faith as a means of overcoming loss, and reconciles love for the lady with love for God in a harmonious vision which goes beyond the *Vita nuova* whilst also fulfilling the seeds of potential unity (Beatrice as a Christological figure, for instance, and a heavenly denizen) therein contained. Petrarch, however, separates the two loves into incompatible forces. In his

focus on earthly love he argues for the necessity of melancholia, because of its greater fidelity to the loss experienced, and for the beauty of melancholia which is the driving creative force behind his vernacular poetic endeavours, whilst at the same time continuing to acknowledge the associated, unavoidable pain and guilt. In Derridean terms (which I clarify fully at the start of Chapter Three), we can therefore say that it is in the lack of success of the work of mourning that the success of Petrarch's poetry lies. Yet here more attention is required regarding the relationship with the divine in Petrarch, having established his melancholic relationship with the earthly.

### *The Petrarchan experience of acedia*

I suggested in Chapter One that *acedia* and melancholia shared a number of symptoms, although the causes traditionally assigned to them differ, the one being considered a result of insufficient love for God and the other, of – according to Freud and Kristeva – some form of unconscious loss and an inability to relinquish a past attachment. In Petrarch, the relationship between *acedia* and melancholia is even more complex, partly because the identification and definition of *acedia* in his works remain such contentious endeavours. Since the role of *acedia* in the *Secretum* has been well-documented and much debated,<sup>368</sup> I discuss this critical question only briefly, before turning to the *Canzoniere* for evidence of a more traditional and theologically oriented form of *acedia* in Petrarch.

The *Secretum* is a dialogue in the presence of a silent Lady Truth between two individuals who are identified as Augustinus and Franciscus, names which recall respectively St Augustine and Petrarch via his first name. In order to stress the distance

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<sup>368</sup> See, for instance, Antonio D'Andrea, 'Petrarca, le due versioni della malattia di "Franciscus" e l'interpretazione del *Secretum*', *Yearbook of Italian Studies*, 3 (1973), 3-25, and the further references in the remainder of this chapter.

between these two speakers and their historical realities (both, are, after all, inventions of Petrarch, and neither can unproblematically be identified as expressing the author's own voice), the two are commonly referred to even in English as Augustinus and Franciscus, a convention which I follow here. The debate is divided into three parts, according to the three days across which it took place, and these parts deal broadly with three different topics: firstly, the need to reflect constantly and profoundly on one's own always imminent mortality; secondly, an examination of conscience structured in a traditional manner according to the seven capital vices; and, thirdly, a discussion of the two 'chains' of love and glory which Augustinus identifies as holding Franciscus back from conversion to God and from following the path to salvation. Towards the end of the second book, the topic of *acedia* is raised in the following manner:

Augustinus: Habet te funesta quedam pestis animi, quam accidiam moderni, veteres egritudinem dixerunt.

Franciscus: Ipsum morbi nomen horreo.

A: Nimirum, diu per hunc graviterque vexatus es.

F: Fateor, et illud accedit quod omnibus ferme quibus angor, aliquid, licet falsi, dulcoris immixtum est; in hac autem tristitia et aspera et misera et horrenda omnia, apertaue semper ad desperationem via et quicquid infelices animas urget in interitum. Ad hec, et reliquarum passionum ut crebros sic breves et momentaneos exterior insultus; hec autem pestis tam tenaciter me arripit interdum, ut integros dies noctesque illigatum torqueat, quod michi tempus non lucis aut vite, sed tartaree noctis et acerbissime mortis instar est. Et (qui supremus miseriarum cumulus dici potest) sic lacrimis et doloribus pascor, atra quadam cum voluptate, ut invitus avellar. (*Secretum*, p. 106)

*A: You are in the grip of a spiritual bane, called by the moderns 'acedia' and by the ancients 'aegritudo' or sickness.*

*F: I find the very name horrifying.*

*A: That does not surprise me, since it has been a grave affliction of yours for a long time.*

*F: I admit that. Moreover, in all the other ills which distress me there is something, however delusory, which is pleasurable; in this sadness, on the other hand, all is cruel and wretched and horrible, the way to despair is always open, and everything conspires to drive unhappy souls to their destruction. To make matters worse, while other afflictions launch attacks which are frequent but short-lived, this sickness takes such a hold on me at times that I am in torment*

*for days and nights on end; I endure a period, not of light and life, but infernal night and the semblance of bitter death. And (what is the worst of all miseries) I feed on my tears and grief, with a sort of dark pleasure, so that it is only with great reluctance that I can tear myself away from them. (MSB, pp. 43–4)*

The conversation continues, but this passage serves to highlight the main traits of *acedia* as defined by the *Secretum*, and from which several problems arise. The first is the equation of medieval *acedia* with pagan, Classical *aegritudo*, which is a strange move seemingly suggesting that *acedia* can be understood outside of a Christian framework and that it is therefore more psychological than theological. The main source text for *aegritudo*, as Augustinus subsequently reminds Franciscus, is Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, and the third book in particular (*Secretum*, p. 120–2; *MSB*, p. 51).<sup>369</sup> Importantly, this sickness is also something about which Augustinus is especially qualified to speak, given that in the *Soliloquia* his historical forebear, St Augustine, diagnoses himself as suffering from *aegritudo*.<sup>370</sup> However, the implications of this syncretic use of synonyms have perhaps been over-exaggerated by critics who thereby overlook Franciscus's subsequent warning 'Hanc sive egritudinem, sive accidiam, sive quid aliud esse diffinis haud magnifacio; ipsa de re convenit' (*Secretum*, p. 108), '*it hardly matters whether you call it a sickness or acedia: we are in agreement on the nature of the affliction*' (*MSB*, p. 45). Hans Baron, moreover, in his work on the

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<sup>369</sup> See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. by J.E. King, rev. edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945).

<sup>370</sup> *Ratio* (Reason) observes 'Modo ergo, quod non omnes tecum sunt amici tui et quod tua valetudo minus integra est, facit animo nonnullam aegritudinem; nam et id esse consequens video', '*The sole fact, then, that your friends are not all with you, and that your health is not wholly sound, occasions for you some distress of mind, for that, I see, must follow*', to which Augustine consents: 'Recte video; negare non possum', '*You see rightly; I cannot deny it*'. Augustine, *Soliloquiorum libri duo; De immortalitate animae; De quantitate animae*, ed. by Wolfgang Hörmann, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 89, Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera, 1:4 (Vindobona: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1986), p. 25 (liber primus, IX.16); *The Soliloquies of St. Augustine*, trans. by Rose Elizabeth Cleveland (London: Williams and Norgate, 1910), p. 27. Amongst other critics, Francesco Tateo has rightly pointed out the importance not only of the *Tusculan Disputations* but also of the *Soliloquia* as models for the *Secretum*. See his *Dialogo interiore e polemica ideologica nel 'Secretum' del Petrarca* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1965), pp. 16–19, 49–52.

chronology of the writing of the *Secretum*, has warned of the danger of ‘overemphasizing what is obviously a limited role played in the second book by a single sin’ and shows that this section was in all likelihood a later addition, rather than a central part of the work from the start.<sup>371</sup>

A further complication is, besides, that Franciscus’s description of his personal experience of *acedia* is, as Siegfried Wenzel comments, unlike any medieval precedent in that it is acknowledged to be paradoxically a source of ‘dark pleasure’.<sup>372</sup> The passage quoted indeed echoes many points in the *Canzoniere* where tears are considered a source of nourishment and enjoyment, such as the lines ‘i’ mi pasco di lagrime’ (93.14) or ‘io son un di quei che ’l pianger giova’ (37.69). In this respect, Franciscus’s description of his personal experience of *acedia* sounds as if it comes close to a form of enjoyable melancholia, and it is unsurprising then that scholarly consideration of Petrarch has often tended to conflate the two. Charles Trinkaus, for instance, glosses Petrarchan *acedia* as ‘hopeless melancholia’,<sup>373</sup> and as ‘the inability to break free from a depression that seems to cherish and cling to its own suffering’.<sup>374</sup> Erich Loos has, similarly, argued that *acedia* is a moral failing for Dante, whereas for Petrarch it is more an illness or psychological problem, thereby once more rendering the Petrarchan version

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<sup>371</sup> Petrarch’s ‘*Secretum*’: *Its Making and its Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1985), p. 215. See also his *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni: Studies in Humanistic and Political Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 51–101. While an initial draft of the *Secretum* is generally accepted to have been composed in 1342–43, Baron contends that the section on *acedia* was added only in 1353.

<sup>372</sup> See Siegfried Wenzel, ‘Petrarch’s *Accidia*’, *Studies in the Renaissance*, 8 (1961), 36–48. Wenzel does, however, note that other aspects such as its definition as a state of despair and *tristitia* do match medieval consensus about the sin.

<sup>373</sup> Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols (London: Constable, 1970), 1, p. 40.

<sup>374</sup> Charles Trinkaus, *The Poet as Philosopher: Petrarch and the Formation of Renaissance Consciousness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 65.

akin to melancholia.<sup>375</sup> The challenge with such readings of Petrarchan *acedia* is that, while they are based on seemingly incontrovertible evidence, they advocate leaving to one side the specificity of the medieval theological category. On the one hand, they are useful commentaries on the presence of a proto-modern, self-torturing, enjoyable form of melancholia in Petrarch's poetry; on the other, they privilege the aesthetic over the moral in a way that disregards Petrarch's very real religious anguish. This constant, unresolved tension in Petrarch between (love) poetry and faith cannot be overlooked.

Oddly, it seems, we must turn not to the *Secretum*, with its overt use of the framework of the seven vices, but rather to the *Canzoniere*, for evidence of a Petrarchan form of *acedia* closer to a traditional medieval understanding of the sin, following Piero Boitani's insistence that 'if there is no explicit mention of *acedia* in the *Canzoniere*, it is enough to glance at the poems where words such as *noia*, *triste*, *angoscia* and *dolore* are used' to prove its presence.<sup>376</sup> Besides, the definitions of *acedia* in *Purgatorio* as 'lento amore' (*Purg.*XVII.130) and "'L'amor del bene, scemo | del suo dover'" (*Purg.*XVII.85-6) are a useful reminder of the sin's association with a lack of fervour in praising and serving God and are highly relevant to Petrarch's representation of his relationship with the divine in the *Canzoniere*. Nonetheless, Petrarchan *acedia* in the *Canzoniere* may match the purgatorial definition of the source of the sin, but its representation is markedly un-Dantean. In Dante, both in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, *acedia* is imagined in an externalised, physical form, whether that of the immobile damned who are consigned

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<sup>375</sup> Erich Loos, 'Die Hauptsünde der *acedia* in Dantes *Commedia* und in Petrarca's *Secretum*', in *Petrarca 1304-1374: Beiträge zu Werk und Wirkung: Herausgegeben von Fritz Schalk* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1975), pp. 156-83.

<sup>376</sup> Boitani, *The Tragic and the Sublime in Medieval Literature*, p. 69, and also Boitani, 'Petrarch's *dilectoso male* and its European context', in *Zusammenhänge, Einflüsse, Wirkungen: Kongressakten zum ersten Symposium des Mediävistenverbandes in Tübingen, 1984*, ed. by Joerg O. Fichte, Karl Heinz Göller, and Bernard Schimmelpfennig (Berlin/New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1986), pp. 299-314 (p. 310).

to the bottom of the dark river Styx, or that of the athletic purgatorial sinners. In Petrarch, however, *acedia* manifests itself only in a psychological, internalised, more abstract or rarefied form. It is also important to note that whereas *acedia* is a personal threat for Petrarch, and is described as it were ‘from the inside’, Dante appears not to have felt any such personal involvement or identification with this sin in particular, unlike other sins such as pride or lust, from which he professes to suffer.<sup>377</sup>

In the *Canzoniere*, *acedia* is intimately linked with the un-Dantean failure to convert which the poems chart.<sup>378</sup> Such a failure is attributed by Petrarch to a lack of love for God, which is considered to be a consequence of his excessive love for Laura. In the *Canzoniere*, I argue that the presence of *acedia* can be uncovered through attention to the theme of ‘oblio’. In this I draw on Michelangelo Picone’s explanation of the line ‘Passa la nave mia colma d’oblio’ (189.1) as a reference to *acedia*, which is a counterpart to excessive earthly love,<sup>379</sup> as well as on Kenelm Foster’s gloss of Petrarchan ‘oblio’ as ‘God-forgetfulness’ and ‘God-oblivion’.<sup>380</sup> The presence of this sin is also audible in the theme of lost time which recurs in the *Canzoniere*, since the purgatorial *accidiosi* shout “‘Ratto, ratto, che ’l tempo non si perda | per poco amor”” (*Purg.*XVIII.103–5). From this perspective, the recurrent lament of Petrarch’s lyric subject for his ‘perduti giorni’ (62.1), most memorably in the opening lines of the final sonnet of the *Canzoniere*, ‘I’ vo piangendo i miei passati tempi | i quai posi in amar cosa mortale’

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<sup>377</sup> Pamela Williams, however, has made the case that Dante’s sin is indeed principally that of *acedia*. See *Through Human Love to God: Essays on Dante and Petrarch* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2007), pp. 19–34. Her argument is less convincing in that it makes no mention of *acedia* in *Inferno*, and seems to emphasise too much the opinion that the *Convivio* signifies a ‘forgetfulness of religious aims and truths’ (p. 9).

<sup>378</sup> See Christian Moevs, ‘Subjectivity and Conversion in Dante and Petrarch’, in *Petrarch and Dante*, pp. 226–59 (especially p. 246 on *acedia* as the impediment to Petrarchan conversion).

<sup>379</sup> Picone, ‘Il sonetto CLXXXIX’, p. 169. It is significant that this poem was originally, in the Chigi manuscript version, chosen to end the first part of the *Canzoniere*, thereby suggesting its importance and perhaps even exemplarity for Petrarch. See Theodore J. Cachey, ‘From Shipwreck to Port: RVF 189 and the Making of the *Canzoniere*’, *Modern Language Notes*, 120 (2005), 30–49.

<sup>380</sup> Foster, *Petrarch*, pp. 75 and 80.

(365.1-2), can be heard as an admission of *acedia*. (That this theme of *temps perdu* in Dante and Petrarch seems to cry out for a Proustian comparison is taken into account in the Epilogue.)

A more obvious Dantean intertext for ‘oblio’ in Petrarch is, however, the episode of Casella’s song in *Purgatorio* II. Just before Casella moves forward to embrace Dante-pilgrim, the purgatorial souls’ curiosity at the two unexplained newcomers delays their steps and is commented on as follows by Dante-narrator: ‘così al viso mio s’affisar quelle | anime fortunate tutte quante, | quasi obliando d’ire a farsi belle’ (*Purg.*II.73-5). This forgetfulness becomes all-consuming when Casella sings one of Dante’s *canzoni* only to be interrupted by Cato:

Gridando: ‘Che è ciò, spiriti lenti?  
                     qual negligenza, quale stare è questo?  
 Correte al monte a spogliarvi lo scoglio  
 ch’esser non lascia a voi Dio manifesto’.       (*Purg.*II.120-3)

The language is markedly similar to the characterisation of purgatorial *acedia* which is defined as ‘lento amore’ (*Purg.*XVII.130) and “‘negligenza e indugio” (in Virgil’s words, *Purg.*XVIII.107), and which is purged by running (‘correndo’, *Purg.*XVIII.97) round the mountain and reciting an appropriate example of dutiful haste (“‘Maria corse con fretta a la montagna”’, *Purg.*XVIII.100). The similarities between the two passages support my *rapprochement* of *acedia* and ‘oblio’;<sup>381</sup> such similarities also again place such an identification in Petrarch under a Dantean sign. A final Dantean point of resonance is the condemnation of Dante-pilgrim’s forgetting of Beatrice in *Purgatorio* XXX and XXXI, although here the resonance works antithetically. While for Dante, forgetting Beatrice is

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<sup>381</sup> An extensive bibliography of criticism on the Casella episode can be found in Robert Hollander, ‘*Purgatorio* II: The New Song and the Old’, *Lectura Dantis*, 6 (Spring 1990), 28-45 (see also works cited in Chapter One). Hollander, while making no mention of *acedia*, does note the significance of the line ‘quasi obliando d’ire a farsi belle’ to which I also wish to draw attention: ‘The innocent-sounding little phrase in fact prepares the reader for Cato’s thunderous rebuke some fifty verses further on’ (p. 37).

analogous to forgetting God, for Petrarch the two forms of ‘oblio’ are at odds rather than aligned. In the *Canzoniere*, it is, instead, the inability to forget Laura that causes the forgetting of God. The intertextual presence of such a contrast is reinforced by recalling the references to ‘oblio’ in the *Vita nuova*, such as Dante’s self-reproach at his ability to forget Beatrice in the sonnet “‘L’amaro lagrimar’”, where Dante criticises his eyes for infidelity (“‘Ora mi par che voi l’obliereste’”, v. 5, VN XXXVII, 7), and ends the poem with the injunction: “‘Voi non dovrete mai, se non per morte, | la vostra donna, ch’è morta, obliare’” (vv. 12–13, VN XXXVII, 8).

Love for Laura is, in Petrarch’s poetry, intimately linked with ‘oblio’, forgetfulness, both of God and of self. This is also a central tenet of the third dialogue of the *Secretum*, where Augustinus warns Franciscus that ‘Illa tamen est omnium precipua [...] quod Dei suique pariter oblivionem parit’ (*Secretum*, p. 160), ‘the worst effect of love is to make us forget God and forget ourselves’ (*MSB*, p. 69). Although *acedia* is not at this point explicitly in question, it is my contention that this statement provides a more precise definition of *acedia* as negligence and a lack of love towards God than that given at the end of the second dialogue. The former, forgetfulness of God, must in this sense be considered a Petrarchan sign of *acedia*, while forgetting the self can act as either an excuse for or a source of this same sin. If man is made ‘ad imaginem Dei’, ‘to the image of God’ (Genesis 1:27), forgetting God is only deemed possible because of a concomitant loss of sense of self. Evidence from the *Canzoniere* of both aspects of forgetful *acedia* is rife. On the one hand, Laura, as a line from the crucial *canzone R VF* 23 puts it, ‘mi face obliar me stesso a forza’ (v. 19). The two actions ‘et mirar lei, et obliar me stesso’ (129.35) are inseparable. In a typical Petrarchan sonnet of internally divided dialogue, the heart addresses the speaking voice critically as ‘tu ch’ài posto te

stesso in oblio' (242.9). On the other hand, the poet is at points explicit about the deleterious effect his love for Laura has on his relationship with God:

ché mortal cosa amar con tanta fede  
quanta a Dio sol per debito convensi,  
piú si disdice a chi piú pregio brama.' (264.99-101)

Statements concerning the omnipresence of Laura in the lyric subject's heart and mind implicitly suggest a similarly reprehensible neglect of divine matters. In the final lines of *RVF* 61, 'l pensier mio, | ch'è sol di lei, sí ch'altra non v'à parte' (vv. 13-14), the term 'altra [cosa]' can be read as referring, amongst other things, to God, especially since the next poem begins in a penitential vein 'Padre del ciel' (62.1).<sup>382</sup> A comparable situation is described in the lines: 'L'amoroso pensiero | ch'alberga dentro, in voi [Laura] mi si discopre | tal che mi trà del cor ogni altra gioia' (71.91-3). Here, the conflict between love for God and love for Laura is emblematised in the choice of the noun 'gioia', which Petrarch uses to define the experience of human love. In this he is no doubt following the troubadour tradition of amorous 'joi',<sup>383</sup> although 'gioia' may equally derive from a technical, Scholastic term used to refer to spiritual joy or the joy of charity that comes from being with God.<sup>384</sup> The ambiguity inherent in the term encapsulates the complex situation of Petrarch's lyric subject, caught between divine and

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<sup>382</sup> For a reading of 'sol'/'sola' in reference to Laura, see Teodolinda Barolini, 'Petrarch as the Metaphysical Poet Who Is Not Dante: Metaphysical Markers at the Beginning of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (*RVF* 1-21)', in *Petrarch and Dante*, pp. 195-225 (pp. 212-17). Reading 'altra' as God is all the more shocking in the light of Barolini's comments that God is in the Augustinian tradition sameness or ipseity rather than alterity (p. 199).

<sup>383</sup> See Charles Camproux, *Le Joy d'amor des troubadours: jeu et joie d'amour* (Montpellier: Causse et Castelnau, 1963). The following definition also stresses the ambiguity of the term: 'An essential property of the courtly love poet, *joi* may be the elation aroused by nature or love, or by extension the receipt of some favour from the *domna*, or sexual fulfilment.' Linda Paterson, 'Fin'amor and the development of the courtly *canso*', in *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, ed. by Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 28-46 (p. 34).

<sup>384</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, 'Quaestio XXVIII: De gaudio', *ST*, III, pp. 180-3 (seconda secundae); 'Question XXVIII: Of Joy', *ST*, IX, pp. 373-80 (part 2, second part). Tristan Kay argues successfully that 'Amor' in Dante (i.e. *Purg.*XXIV.53) has, similarly, erotic and religious connotations at one and the same time: 'Desire, Subjectivity, and Lyric Poetry in Dante's *Convivio* and *Commedia*', in *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages*, pp. 164-84 (p. 180).

earthly love. Most strikingly, this same adverb 'altra' appears three times at the end of sonnet 97 to signify implicitly the conflict between Laura and God:

Amor in *altra* parte non mi sprona,  
né i pie' sanno *altra* via, né le man' come  
lodar si possa in carte *altra* persona. (97.12-14, emphases mine)

The last line in particular, with its reference to a poetics of praise, sets itself against the many psalms which advocate the necessity of praising God continuously and exclusively.<sup>385</sup> Petrarch's poetry of praise is also at odds with the model of the 'stilo de la loda' from the *Vita nuova*, where praise of Beatrice would seem to lead to praise of her Creator, rather than acting as a barrier or obstacle to God.

In the *Canzoniere*, God and one's true self are in constant danger of being forgotten because of the overpowering force of Laura's image: 'sol mirando, oblio ne l'alma piove | d'ogni altro dolce, et Lethe al fondo bibo' (193.3-4). Laura herself, in contrast, is consistently impervious to the threat of Lethe: 'Tornami a mente, anzi v'è dentro, quella | ch'indi per Lethe esser non pò sbandita' (336.1-2). As Gur Zak notes perceptively, Lethe is markedly different for Petrarch and Dante. For the latter, in the Earthly Paradise, Lethe is a means of forgetting one's sinful past (and Eunoe restores one's memory of past good), whereas for the former it signifies a forgetting of the present which facilitates total immersion in the past.<sup>386</sup> In this manner, Petrarchan

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<sup>385</sup> For example, Psalm 9.2: 'confitebor tibi Domine in toto corde meo'; 'I will give praise to thee, O Lord, with my whole heart'. The obsession with Laura's name may also be considered a perversion of exhortations such as Psalm 134.3, 'laudate Dominum quia bonus Dominus psallite nomini eius quoniam suave', 'Praise ye the Lord, for the Lord is good: sing ye to his name, for it is sweet'.

<sup>386</sup> Gur Zak, *Petrarch's Humanism*, p. 50. Petrarch is a notable omission from Harald Weinrich's *Lethe: Kunst und Kritik des Vergessens* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1997), which however does devote a number of pages to Dante and Proust (pp. 40-57, and pp. 187-93, respectively). This critic's one allusion to Petrarch identifies the relevance of the *Trionfi* (and especially the *Triumphus Temporis*) to the theme of forgetting (pp. 118, 284). As I have shown here, however, this same theme should be recognised to be a constant preoccupation of the *Canzoniere*.

melancholia can be described as the opposite of the work of mourning, since it consists in a refusal to forget the loved object. Pertinently, the poet asks:

Lasso, se ragionando si rinfresca  
quel'ardente desio  
che nacque il giorno ch'io  
lassai di me la miglior parte a dietro,  
et s'Amor se ne va per lungo oblio,  
chi mi conduce a l'ésca,  
onde 'l mio dolor cresca? (37.49-55)

While 'lungo oblio' would enable a detachment of the self from the loved object (analogous, then, to the Freudian work of mourning), Petrarch's writing is melancholic in its irrepressible perpetuation of a therefore interminable amorous attachment. The relevance of Bersanian sublimation, in which writing serves to extend rather than put an end to desire, is clear.

In *RVF* 325, both the key terms 'oblio' and 'altra' are used within a few lines over a stanza break:

Cominciai a mirar[la] con tal desio  
che me stesso e 'l mio mal posi in oblio.

I' era in terra, e 'l cor in paradiso,  
dolcemente obliando ogni altra cura. (325.44-7)

Ironically, the 'paradiso' here is one where God is wholly neglected and Laura has usurped his place.<sup>387</sup> The choice of the word 'cura' is, moreover, telling, given that *acedia* etymologically means a lack of care, so that 'obliando ogni altra cura' particularly while in a paradisiacal space appears to be an implicit but clear sign of this particular sin.<sup>388</sup> It is also notable that the phrase 'altra cura' appears in all three of the *cantiche* of

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<sup>387</sup> A possible lyric precedent for this is Giacomo da Lentini's sonnet 'Io m'aggio posto in core a Dio servire', in which the poet states his desire to go to 'paradiso' (v. 2) only if his lady is there. See *Antologia della poesia italiana: Duecento*, ed. by Cesare Segre and Carlo Ossola (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), pp. 43-4.

<sup>388</sup> See the *OED*'s etymology of *acedia*, and also Henry Cochin, *Le Frère de Pétrarque et le livre du repos des religieux* (Paris: Librairie Émile Bouillon, 1903), pp. 205-21 (especially, on the etymology of the word,

the *Commedia*, firstly to describe the distractedness of the damned souls (*Inf.*IX.102), secondly to indicate the transition from one terrace to the next (*Purg.*XXV.111), and thirdly as Beatrice's encouragement to Dante-pilgrim to turn from her eyes to the souls in the Heaven of Saturn (*Par.*XXI.21), thereby giving it a rich polysemy for Petrarch to exploit. Moreover, an etymological reading of 'cura' is supported by two other passages in which forms of the verb 'curar' appear in the *Canzoniere*, one of which is the most explicit expression in the collection of the recognition that love for Laura means not loving God enough:

Questi m' à fatto men amare Dio  
 ch' i' non doveva, et men curar me stesso:  
 per una donna ò messo  
 egualmente in non cale ogni pensiero. (360.31-4)

Here, 'non cale' seems an extremely suitable and probably deliberate vernacular translation of the word *acedia*, which means literally a 'non-caring-state' or 'in-curia'. Similarly, the designation of Laura as 'lei che sola al mondo curo' (233.6), in the light of this reading of the verb, has an uneasy, idolatrous undercurrent. From a divine perspective, *acedia* is the opposite of the enduring affection of melancholia, since the former is a sign of indifference or emotional apathy (towards God), yet from an earthly perspective the two are intertwined as, for Petrarch at least, both result from an excess of emotional attachment to a mortal being. If Beatrice is at risk of being eclipsed by God in *Paradiso* ('Bëatrice eclissò ne l'oblio', *Par.*X.60), the pattern is reversed in the *Canzoniere*, where it is now God who is in danger of being forgotten in favour of Laura.

## Conclusion

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pp. 208-9). My reading contradicts Georg Voigt's somewhat uncharitable assertion that Petrarch would not have known the etymology of the word *acedia*, in his *Il Risorgimento dell'antichità classica: Ovvero, il primo secolo dell'umanesimo*, trans. by D. Valbusa, 2 vols (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1888-90), I, p. 141.

In this chapter I have sought to delineate some of the most striking aspects of Petrarchan melancholia. To this end, both psychoanalytical and contrastive literary frameworks have been used: namely Kristeva on the one hand, and Dante on the other. Kristeva's *Soleil noir* has helped to draw out the creativity of melancholia and its aesthetic appeal, whilst also keeping in mind the linguistic inhibition and fragmentation that are equally a consequence of the experience of melancholia. In the *Canzoniere*, compelling evidence can be found for both the artistic merit of melancholia and the simultaneous threat it poses to the speaking voice. Petrarch's fear of self- and poetic fragmentation is mirrored in the piecemeal construction of the *Canzoniere* – the 'rime sparse' (1.1) or *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* – on a macrotextual level, even as the act of collecting them together makes claims for their essential unity. Yet the individual texts reveal a partial transcendence of such fears, as the poet goes on speaking not despite but because of his unending melancholia, and fragmentation becomes more a recurrent thematic concern than a stylistic reality on a microtextual level.

By choosing to return to moments from *Inferno*, while taking them out of their original eschatological context, Petrarch characterises his lyric self as comparable to the infernal melancholics, and thereby implicitly vaunts the beauty and creativity of the infernal, fragmented, melancholic voice. Nonetheless, the moral, religious backdrop is never wholly obscured in Petrarch, so that he remains at the same time tormented by his inability to achieve a Dantean conversion and leave Hell behind. Focus on Petrarchan *acedia* helps to see how religious preoccupations remain as essential for Petrarch as for Dante, and therefore provides an important counterbalance to the view of an all-too-modern Petrarch wholly endorsing the pleasures and benefits of Kristevan creative melancholia. Bringing this chapter to a close with an analysis of *acedia* in Petrarch has

enabled me to temper such a triumphant vision of Petrarch by emphasising how moral and religious concerns continue to plague the *Canzoniere* as well as the *Secretum*, even if it is poetry which endures regardless of such concerns. Although Petrarch's representation of *acedia* is much more psychological than Dante's and avoids the concrete imagery of *Inferno* VII, its importance and relevance suggest that Petrarch is never quite able to free himself the sinful constraints of the *Inferno*. Petrarch's poetry may vaunt the pleasures of grief and present his melancholic love as a source of inspiration and creativity, but underneath such optimistic assertions lurks an insidious awareness of the unavoidable moral pitfalls of such a position. Dante's hold, in the end, is harder to shake off than Petrarch would like us to think. If Petrarch is the first modern poet of creative melancholia, he remains at the same time undeniably medieval in his concern for the dangers of *acedia*. For Petrarch, then, Dante's *Inferno* is at once a poetic model and a fearful vision of the consequences of failing to love God adequately. Petrarch's attempt to rescue infernal language from its context of condemnation by associating suffering with poetry rather than with divine punishment is undermined, though never entirely, by the perpetual resurgence of the moral discourse of *acedia* in the *Canzoniere*. Alongside the 'reciproca compenetrazione di acedia e malinconia' posited by Agamben,<sup>389</sup> important differences and tensions between the two – the fruits of a contrastive reading – emerge.

Thus I speak of a 'fraught poetics of melancholia' in Petrarch in order to respect this contradiction at the heart of his literary enterprise. The adjective 'fraught' is appropriate both in its nautical resonance,<sup>390</sup> given Petrarch's love of seafaring imagery, and in its more usual meaning of distressed or troubled. It captures neatly the Kristevan

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<sup>389</sup> Agamben, *Stanze*, p. 19.

<sup>390</sup> The *OED*'s first definition is 'Of a vessel: Laden'.

paradox that melancholia remains for Petrarch personally painful and poetically productive, in contrast to Dante's eventual rejection and transcendence of a melancholic infernal impasse.

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This chapter has introduced Petrarch as oscillating between a form of Kristevan melancholia and *acedia*, and contrasted Petrarch's response to the death of the beloved with that of the Dante of the *Vita nuova* and *Commedia*. Chapter Three, finally, interpolates Dante, Petrarch, and Proust with a focus on shared mournful intertexts under the aegis of Derrida's reflections on 'demi-deuil' and the proper name.

# AIEEEEEEEJD

## **Chapter Three.** **Proust's *Recherche*, Derridean 'demi-deuil', and Mimetic Mourning**

I not only live each endless day in grief, but live each day thinking about living each day in grief.<sup>391</sup>

In the first half of this chapter I explore Proust's representation of mourning in the light of Derrida's writings on grief. While Proust's narrator's explicit comments on mourning may seem to endorse an analysis of *Albertine disparue* as the narrative space where the work of mourning is carried out, I argue that there is much evidence, even if at times repressed, that the representation of the experience of Proust's protagonist is closer to Derridean 'demi-deuil' in terms of questions of fidelity and temporality. In the second half, I situate Proust amongst a variety of mournful exemplars, not only Dante and Petrarch, but also source texts such as the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice which all three writers have in common, following an adopted Girardian framework of external (artistic) mimetic mediation. This discussion incorporates revealing reflections on the role of the proper name in Petrarch, Proust, and Derrida, and its place in the experience of grief. Consideration of the book of Lamentations in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust helps to bring into focus the problem of seeking to be faithful to the uniqueness of the loss suffered (the death of the unique and irreplaceable beloved) while at the same time yearning to turn to shared literary, mythological, or biblical modes and models of mourning.

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<sup>391</sup> C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 11.

Throughout the chapter I seek to set Proust in relation to my discussion of Dante and Petrarch in the two preceding chapters.

*From Romantic melancholy to Derridean 'demi-deuil'*

For here is the final tormenting, unanswerable question: what is 'success' in mourning? Does it lie in remembering or in forgetting? A staying still or a moving on? Or some combination of both?<sup>392</sup>

In many respects, Proust's use of the adjective 'mélancolique' in the *Recherche* overlaps with the cognate noun 'malinconia' which I found at the start of Chapter Two to be frequently applied to Petrarch by nineteenth-century Italian critics. In the *Recherche*, a brief survey of the term shows that Proustian melancholy is, like its nineteenth-century forbear, connected with nostalgia, the past, desire, regret, and nobility. Examples abound: Golo of the magic lantern is 'toujours aussi noble et aussi mélancolique' (*ALR* I:10); the protagonist's mother's reading aloud of *François le Champi* is a reminder of 'la mélancolie qu'il y a dans la tendresse' (*ALR* I:44); melancholy is 'songeuse' (*ALR* II:430), 'amoureuse' (*ALR* II:679), and a 'douce tristesse' (*ALR* IV:141); voluptuousness and regret are both melancholy (*ALR* I:407 and 617). Melancholy is associated with artistic creation (the artist experiences an 'orgueilleuse mélancolie', *ALR* II:199), and particularly with music, which is by nature melancholy because it is fleeting and time-bound. The narrator remarks on 'la mélancolie qui s'attache à la connaissance de tels ouvrages [musicaux], comme de tout ce qui se réalise dans le temps' (*ALR* I:521). From this perspective Proust might appear to be one possible culminating point of the incipient association of melancholy with beauty, art, and temporality in Petrarch,

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<sup>392</sup> Barnes, *Levels of Life*, p. 116.

which – as discussed in Chapter Two – came to a head in Romantic criticism of this poet. Yet Proust is not, of course, merely a perpetuator of Romantic traditions, but rather places a certain distance between himself and the nineteenth century.<sup>393</sup> While melancholy in Proust's novel is explicit, frequent, and traditionally Romantic, I argue, in contrast, that melancholia in the *Recherche* is implicit, unspoken, and idiosyncratic.

I thus leave to one side Proust's explicit use of the terms 'mélancolie' and 'mélancolique' with all their well-established poetic associations, and turn instead to consider the question of twentieth-century melancholia in the *Recherche*. Having defined the state of the souls in Dante's *Infèrno* as melancholic in a Freudian and Kristevan sense in Chapter One, I then looked in Chapter Two at how Petrarch attempts to recuperate this melancholia from its infernal context and render it instead characteristic of love and loss in this life and a necessary source of poetic inspiration. In this chapter I analyse mourning in the *Recherche*, particularly as portrayed in the opening section of *Albertine disparue*, according to a model that goes beyond Freud, that of Derrida's notion of a form of melancholia that is at once ethically necessary and impossible.

Psychoanalytical readings of the *Recherche* have been fairly frequent and often fruitful, as already acknowledged in the Introduction. One key area that both Freud and Proust attempt to analyse and explain is the experience of grief. As several critics have suggested, a parallel reading of *Albertine disparue* and Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' highlights many points of consonance between Freud's theory of the work of mourning and Proust's narrative of his protagonist's grief at his beloved's departure

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<sup>393</sup> See B.G. Rogers, '6. Proust and the Nineteenth Century', in *Marcel Proust 1871-1922: A Centenary Volume*, ed. by Peter Quennell (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), pp. 129-45, and Compagnon, *Proust entre deux siècles*.

and death.<sup>394</sup> Principally, in both texts mourning is presented as a gradual process of detachment from the loved object which makes space, through ‘oubli’, for the formation of new object attachments. Yet such a view of mourning is open to criticism for its lack of fidelity and its self-destruction,<sup>395</sup> and is, moreover, seemingly inappropriate to the complexities of the Proustian narrative as, indeed, of grief itself. For a start, Proust’s protagonist’s grief is perhaps closer to Freudian melancholia than the work of mourning in its manifestly guilt-ridden nature. Distinguishing features of Freudian melancholia are, after all, ‘self-reproaches and self-revilings, and [...] a delusional expectation of punishment’ (*SE* XIV:244), which we might hear fulfilled in Proust’s protagonist’s feelings of shame at surviving Albertine (‘la honte de lui survivre’, *ALR* IV:78), and his guilt for her death as for his grandmother’s demise, so that his life appears to him ‘souillée d’un double assassinat’ (*ALR* IV:78).

Besides, both Goodkin and Elsner warn against reducing Freud to ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, and highlight how both personal letters and *The Ego and the Id* show a different, more mature response on the part of Freud to the problems of understanding and categorising grief.<sup>396</sup> In particular, a letter to a friend, Ludwig Binswanger, whose son has died, explicitly asserts the interminability and ethical necessity of melancholia:

Although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute. No matter what may fill the gap, even if it be filled completely, it

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<sup>394</sup> See, for instance, Randolph Splitter’s *Proust’s ‘Recherche’*, pp. 43–4 and 114, and Schulte Nordholt, *Le Moi créateur*, pp. 128 and 138–42.

<sup>395</sup> For a criticism of Proust’s novel for its promotion of forgetting the deceased whilst indulging in self-remembrance, see Alessia Ricciardi, ‘2. Cool Memories’, in *The Ends of Mourning*, pp. 69–119.

<sup>396</sup> Goodkin, *Around Proust*, pp. 127–45. Elsner makes a similar comment to Goodkin, but explores more interestingly mournful readings beyond Freud, including, most pertinently for my analysis, Derrida, although her focus is on ‘deuil impossible’ rather than ‘demi-deuil’. ‘Mourning and Creativity’, pp. 8–15 (on Freud), and pp. 37–52 (on Derrida).

nevertheless remains something else. And actually this is how it should be. It is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish.<sup>397</sup>

In *The Ego and the Id*, besides, melancholia is valorised as an important part of the ego's 'character'. In place of mournful amnesia, which was the expected and desired outcome of 'Mourning and Melancholia', Freud now favours melancholic memory, and suggests that 'the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices' (*SE* XIX:29).

Derrida continues in the steps of the later Freud, arguing that the work of mourning is ethically unacceptable, since it ultimately entails forgetful infidelity towards the deceased. Typically, Derrida questions the dichotomy between mourning and melancholia and arrives at a complex reformulation of the relationship between the two:

Est-ce que la fidélité c'est le deuil ? C'est aussi le contraire : le fidèle ou la fidèle, c'est quelqu'un qui est endeuillé. Le deuil c'est une intériorisation de l'autre mort en soi ; faire le deuil, c'est garder, c'est une expérience de fidélité, mais c'est aussi le contraire. Donc l'impossibilité de faire son deuil, et même la volonté de ne pas faire son deuil, c'est aussi une forme de fidélité. Si faire son deuil et ne pas faire son deuil sont deux formes de fidélité et deux formes d'infidélité, la seule chose qui reste – c'est là que je parle de demi-deuil – c'est une expérience entre les deux ; je n'arrive pas à faire mon deuil de tout ce que je perds, parce que je veux le garder, et en même temps, ce que je fais de mieux, c'est le deuil, c'est le perdre, parce qu'en faisant le deuil, je le garde au-dedans de moi.<sup>398</sup>

Paradoxically, it is in the failure of Freudian mourning that lies Derrida's version of successful mourning. In Derrida's words, 'c'est la loi, la loi du deuil, la loi de la loi, toujours en deuil, qu'il lui faudra bien échouer pour réussir. Pour réussir, il lui faudra bien *échouer*, *bien* échouer.'<sup>399</sup> Derrida is the champion of a 'deuil impossible qui pourtant reste à l'œuvre, creusant interminablement au fond de nos mémoires', so that

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<sup>397</sup> Letter 239 to Ludwig Binswanger, dated 11–12 April 1929, in *Letters of Sigmund Freud 1873–1939*, ed. by Ernst L. Freud, trans. by Tania and James Stern (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), p. 386.

<sup>398</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Dialongues', p. 161.

<sup>399</sup> *Chaque fois unique*, p. 179 (original emphases).

‘le deuil est interminable. Inconsolable. Irréconciliable. Jusqu’à la mort’.<sup>400</sup> Derrida rebels against the end of Freudian mourning which is a result of a process of forgetting the lost other, and instead champions a melancholic refusal of the teleology of ‘normal’ mourning: ‘une certaine mélancolie doit protester encore contre le deuil normal. Elle ne doit jamais se résigner à l’introjection idéalisante. [...] L’oubli commence là. Il *faut* donc la mélancolie.’<sup>401</sup> If this last pronouncement seems too assertive, it is worth remembering the caution Derrida expresses elsewhere: ‘« Il faut » ne veut pas seulement dire c’est nécessaire mais, en français, étymologiquement, « cela manque » ou « fait défaut ». La faute ou la défaillance n’est jamais loin.’<sup>402</sup> The phrase ‘Il *faut* donc la mélancolie’ neatly encapsulates Derrida’s designation of ‘demi-deuil’, that is, of a melancholia that is both necessary and impossible.

Derrida’s ethics of mourning seem particularly pertinent to Proust’s representation of grief in the *Recherche*, and concern about fidelity to the lost love object plagues Proust as it does Derrida. Proust’s narrator is very aware that idealising nostalgia concerning the beloved is unfaithful because it is inaccurate and is thus the first stage of forgetting. Once Albertine starts to appear ‘plus douce, plus belle’ (*ALR* IV:45), it is clear that the work of forgetting has begun. The protagonist risks retaining of her only ‘une image sommaire, embellie’ (*ALR* IV:44), which is a betrayal of her true nature, since she has always been unpredictable, unknowable, ambivalent, fragmentary, and unstable. Furthermore, at first glance it would seem that Proust’s protagonist is not concerned with perpetuating his past relationship in that after a certain amount of time has elapsed he displays great interest in other ‘jeunes filles’ and seems keen to find a

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<sup>400</sup> *Chaque fois unique*, pp. 124 and 178.

<sup>401</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Béliers. Le Dialogue ininterrompu: entre deux infinis, le poème* (Paris: Galilée, 2003), p. 74.

<sup>402</sup> Derrida, *Sauf le nom* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p. 96.

replacement for Albertine. Yet while the reader might rush to label him as unfaithful, the narrator takes great care to show how this apparent infidelity is, paradoxically, a sign of continuing fidelity. This is because the protagonist's new desire is modelled on his past experience of life with Albertine. In this respect he is, or so the narrator claims, 'fidèle même dans l'infidélité' (*ALR* IV:487), in that although he faithlessly seeks new love objects, the manner in which he does so is faithful to his memory of his lost love. A new relationship is, strangely, the sign of the enduring importance and significance of a previous relationship: 'Je comprenais maintenant les veufs qu'on croit consolés et qui prouvent au contraire qu'ils sont inconsolables, parce qu'ils se remarient avec leur belle-sœur' (*ALR* IV:134). The question of whether the loved object can be forgotten and replaced is therefore complex, as it is evident that the attempt to replace the loved object can also be considered to be predicated upon faithful memory of the past, rather than on forgetfulness, as is presumed in the Freudian work of mourning.

Despite this hope that an old relationship can be repeated and relived through a replacement love object, Proust intimates that the attempt is always doomed to failure, for 'jamais rien ne se répète exactement' (*ALR* IV:80). The beloved is not replaceable and the emotions become weaker and weaker and less and less satisfying at each romantic repetition; other women are 'de ces substituts de plaisirs se remplaçant l'un l'autre en dégradation successive' (*ALR* IV:133). This is a rewriting of an earlier, immature hope that women might be 'instruments interchangeables d'un plaisir toujours identique' (*ALR* I:155). Since in his attempts at infidelity, the protagonist is strangely more and more faithful to Albertine, new love interests only serve to highlight her absence and irreplaceability. The narrator recognises that 'Ce que ces femmes avaient d'Albertine me faisait mieux ressentir ce que d'elle il leur manquait, et qui était tout, et

qui ne serait plus jamais puisque Albertine était morte' (*ALR* IV:137). The apparent replacing of Albertine with other women reveals in fact that Albertine is wholly and irrevocably irreplaceable. The 'renaissance' that any new relationship represents:

Est moins celle du besoin d'aimer, auquel il fait croire, que celle du besoin de l'absente. De sorte que même la ressemblance de la femme que j'avais choisie avec Albertine, la ressemblance, si j'arrivais à l'obtenir, de sa tendresse avec celle d'Albertine, ne me faisaient que mieux sentir l'absence de ce que j'avais sans le savoir cherché. (*ALR* IV:135)

The reader is thus left with the troubling and complicated notion of the protagonist acting 'en souvenir d'Albertine oubliée' (*ALR* IV:255). Albertine is forgotten in so much as a replacement is sought, but this quest is at the same time determined by the protagonist's undying memory of his love for her. Set against the backdrop of Chapters One and Two on Dante and Petrarch respectively, Proust's complex justification of infidelity as in fact a sign of fidelity and continuing mourning appears all the more shocking. For Petrarch's lyric subject, infidelity is unthinkable and unimaginable; it is never even so much as a vague threat to his enduring, monomaniacal obsession with Laura.<sup>403</sup> For Dante, infidelity to Beatrice is a sinful temptation to be resisted in the *Vita nuova* and a lapse in constancy for which Beatrice herself upbraids the pilgrim sharply at the end of *Purgatorio*. Yet the temptress 'donna gentile' is interestingly presented as attractive to the protagonist because of her physical resemblance to Beatrice ('molte fiate ["la donna gentile"] mi ricordava de la mia nobilissima donna, che di simile colore si mostrava tuttavia', *VN* XXXVI, 1),<sup>404</sup> which

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<sup>403</sup> See, though, Justin Steinberg, 'Dante *Estravagante*, Petrarca *Disperso*, and the Spectre of the other Woman', in *Petrarch and Dante*, pp. 263-89, for a discussion of what Petrarch excludes from the *Canzoniere* in order to present such an image of absolute fidelity.

<sup>404</sup> On similarity as a prerequisite for falling in love, following Cavalcanti's identification of the necessity of two lovers' 'simile [...] complessione' in 'Donna me prega', see Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves*, p. 160.

partly reflects or anticipates the Proustian situation of continuing attachment to an archetype being revealed in the therefore doomed quest for a replacement.

Nonetheless, Proust is close to Petrarch in his depiction of melancholia as necessary and endless. In this respect both Petrarch and Proust stand in opposition to Dante's vision in the *Commedia*, and in *Purgatorio* in particular, of the work of mourning as a painful but finite process leading (albeit via the problematic episode of the resurgent Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise) to a heavenly state of unending beatitude. Proust's narrator attempts to convince the reader that his love for Albertine and grief at her death can come to an end, following a comparable process to Freudian normal mourning. After a suitable interval of time has elapsed for the work of mourning to take place, the narrator announces, in a short, simple sentence, 'Je n'aimais plus Albertine' (*ALR* IV:172). Yet this declaration is immediately undermined by the narrator's subsequent, contiguous reflections:

Tout au plus certains jours, quand il faisait un de ces temps qui en modifiant, en réveillant notre sensibilité, nous remettent en rapport avec le réel, je me sentais cruellement triste en pensant à elle. Je souffrais d'un amour qui n'existait plus. Ainsi les amputés, par certains changements de temps ont mal dans la jambe qu'ils ont perdue. (*ALR* IV:172)

In this passage the narrator moves from asserting the successful (in Freudian terms) end of his mourning to a position which instead acknowledges that Albertine is irreplaceable and that his mourning for her is intermittent but unending. The image of the amputee is a moving tribute which suggests that the protagonist has lost a crucial part of himself in losing Albertine and that he will forever remain incomplete and limping without her. The imagining of grief as phantom limb pain complicates any

simplistic distinction between presence and absence, as the leg is lost and absent yet continues to feel unpredictably and intensely all too present.<sup>405</sup>

This passage is followed by a new paragraph which attempts to place a certain distance from the admission that mourning is a permanent physical disability (symbolised as the loss of a leg): ‘La disparition de ma souffrance, et de tout ce qu’elle emmenait avec elle, me laissait diminué comme souvent la guérison d’une maladie qui tenait dans notre vie une grande place’ (*ALR* IV:172). Yet even here the idea that one can be cured of grief is undermined by the recognition that such an end would leave one’s forces depleted and one’s self diminished, both of which are symptoms of a melancholic position. Proust’s narrator transforms the apparent completion of the work of mourning into fresh cause for grief, by viewing the ‘guérison’ as itself lamentable, a further diminution or loss.

This continual subversion and contradiction of declarations of the end of the narrator’s love and mourning is particularly stark in the Venetian third chapter of *Albertine disparue*, where, as Carles Besa has observed, ‘La leçon optimiste que l’on pourrait tirer d’une lecture trop rapide [i.e. that the protagonist is by this point carefree and ready for a new love] est déconstruite par la progression du texte’.<sup>406</sup> Again, assertions such as ‘j’avais en grande partie oublié Albertine’ (*ALR* IV:205) are challenged and rendered suspect by the contrary admission that ‘j’aurais aimé qu’elle fût avec moi’ (*ALR* IV:207). The episode of the mistaken authorship of the telegram which is falsely attributed to Albertine rather than to Gilberte seems especially designed to emphasise the protagonist’s newfound indifference to his past love. ‘Albertine ne ressuscitait nullement

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<sup>405</sup> See James Krasner, ‘Doubtful Arms and Phantom Limbs: Literary Portrayals of Embodied Grief’, *PMLA*, 119:2 (March 2004), 218–32, and also David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>406</sup> Carles Besa, ‘Proust du côté de Venise ou l’âme en deuil’, *Bulletin Marcel Proust*, 43 (1993), 103–11 (p. 103).

pour moi avec son corps' (*ALR* IV:220), the narrator records. And yet a day or two later he relates how 'Carpaccio [...] faillit un jour ranimer mon amour pour Albertine' (*ALR* IV:225) by reminding him of a coat which Albertine was wont to wear. The narrator admits 'je fus envahi pendant quelques instants par un sentiment trouble et bientôt dissipé de désir et de mélancolie' (*ALR* IV:226). The attentive reader is, then, likely to consider the narrator's earlier protestations of indifference as a form of telling 'dénégation', denial.<sup>407</sup>

The ebb and flow of the protagonist's fluctuating emotions mirrors 'le flux et le reflux' of the twice-daily Venetian tide (*ALR* IV:208), and continues in *Le Temps retrouvé*. In the final volume, the assertion that 'la mémoire involontaire elle-même' has 'perdu l'amour d'Albertine' is followed by the recognition that there is a further, physical 'mémoire involontaire des membres' (*ALR* IV:277) which continues to remember her. The reader naturally distrusts the narrator's clear-headed, rational pronouncement, since the essence of involuntary memory is its unpredictability and its inability to be controlled, and it is defined much earlier in the *Recherche* precisely as that which 'quand toutes nos larmes semblent taries, sait nous faire pleurer encore' (*ALR* II:4). As Roger Laporte comments, 'Pendant quelques heures, quelques jours, le narrateur sera inconsolable, puis l'oubli fera son œuvre, le travail du deuil – comme on dirait de nos jours – s'accomplira, l'indifférence règnera à nouveau, à moins que n'intervienne un nouveau souvenir involontaire.'<sup>408</sup> Besides, the narrator subsequently allows his continuing mournful desire for Albertine to interrupt the carefully constructed, conscious narrative of indifference and forgetting, crying out 'Ah ! si Albertine avait

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<sup>407</sup> This is the conclusion reached by Jacques Dubois in *Pour Albertine: Proust et le sens du social* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), p. 25. See also the entry for '(dé)négation' in *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, pp. 112–14.

<sup>408</sup> Roger Laporte, *Marcel Proust: le narrateur et l'écrivain* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1994), p. 37 (my emphasis).

vécu, qu'il eût été doux, les soirs où j'aurais dîné en ville de lui donner rendez-vous dehors, sous les arcades ! [...] Hélas, j'étais seul' (*ALR* IV:314). Even later in the final volume, the narrator divulges 'Il m'arrivait parfois de souhaiter que, par un miracle, entrassent auprès de moi, restées vivantes contrairement à ce que j'avais cru, ma grand-mère, Albertine. Je croyais les voir, mon cœur s'élançait vers elles' (*ALR* IV:566).

In the end, the narrator's endless mourning will out, even if it resurfaces only intermittently. In this movement of oscillation, fluctuation, and irresolvable contradiction discernible in the representation of grief for Albertine in the *Recherche*, Proustian melancholia strikingly anticipates the rhythm of Derrida's 'demi-deuil'. As Derrida illustrates in 'Spéculer – sur "Freud"', 'demi-deuil' can be figured by the endless *fort/da* rhythm which is, for Derrida, not merely a narrated event (the child playing with the cotton reel as narrated by Freud) but also, and more importantly, a structuring and destabilising force at the level of narration in Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'.<sup>409</sup> A similar structurally interminable, unstable, repetitive *fort/da* as regards mourning for Albertine is evident in the narration of the *Recherche*. The mobility of Derridean 'demi-deuil' appears to provide a way out of the impeded, blocked, totally arrested rhythm of Freudian or Kristevan melancholia which I discussed in relation to Dante's *Inferno* in Chapter One. The movement of 'demi-deuil' is resistant to the teleology of the Freudian work of mourning, and allows for an unstable relationship with the deceased to be perpetuated in a more productive and, Derrida would argue, in a more ethical way than is possible in the stasis and self-absorption of traditional psychoanalytical melancholia. Reading Proust through Derrida and focusing on

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<sup>409</sup> See Jacques Derrida, 'Spéculer – sur "Freud"', p. 356. The 'drame du coucher' is interpreted in the light of the Freudian, rather than the Derridean, *fort/da* by Elsner in a section of 'Mourning and Creativity', entitled 'Trauerspiel and the (M)other', pp. 131-8.

*Albertine disparue* adds grist to L. Scott Lerner's suggestion, concerning the protagonist's mourning of the grandmother, that 'Perhaps, in the end, the lesson of Proust's *intermittences* is that our definitions of 'successful' and 'normal' mourning are too rigid. Perhaps even 'normal' mourning can remain permanently incomplete. Not continuously, but *intermittently*.'<sup>410</sup>

Proust would also seem to agree with Derrida's recommendation that in grief the lost loved one should be treated as far as possible as neither living nor dead, but both at once. This is certainly one important sense of Derridean 'demi-deuil', the awareness that faithfulness to the lost other can best be achieved through neither absolute fidelity (the other is living and cannot be replaced) nor absolute infidelity (the other is dead and therefore can be replaced), but rather by a complex, unstable middle term, the imagining of the lost love object as 'mort vivant'.<sup>411</sup> The lost object should not be treated either 'comme d'un vivant *ou* comme d'un mort',<sup>412</sup> but as both at once, in a way that at once respects his or her alterity and reality. The '*deuil possible* qui intériorise en nous l'image, l'idole ou l'idéal de l'autre mort et ne vivant qu'en nous' is considered less faithful than the '*deuil impossible* qui, laissant à l'autre son altérité, en respecte l'éloignement infini, refuse ou se trouve incapable de le prendre en soi'.<sup>413</sup> One way of maintaining this necessary strangeness and distance, whilst continuing to mourn for the deceased, is through the imagining of a crypt inside the bereft subject, in which the lost object is preserved as different from and alien to the subject although at the same time part of the

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<sup>410</sup> L. Scott Lerner, 'Mourning and Subjectivity from Bersani to Proust, Klein, and Freud', *Diacritics*, 37:1 (Spring 2007), 41-53 (p. 53).

<sup>411</sup> *L'Oreille de l'autre: otobiographies, transferts, traductions: textes et débats avec Jacques Derrida*, ed. by Claude Lévesque and Christie V. McDonald (Montréal: VLB, 1982), p. 80, and 'Fors', p. 25 ('L'habitant d'une crypte est toujours un mort-vivant'). The same phrase – 'morte-vivante' – is used in reference to Albertine and to the grandmother by Schulte Nordholt (without reference to Derrida) in *Le Moi créateur*, pp. 152 and 193.

<sup>412</sup> *Chaque fois unique*, p. 70.

<sup>413</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*, p. 29.

grieving individual, in ‘un lieu *compris* dans un autre mais rigoureusement séparé de lui, isolé de l’espace général par cloisons, clôture, enclave’.<sup>414</sup>

Proust’s protagonist does relate to Albertine in a way that would satisfy Derrida’s criteria for melancholic fidelity to the strangeness and uniqueness of the lost loved one, as a particularly revealing moment in the Venetian episode makes clear:

Parfois au crépuscule en rentrant à l’hôtel je sentais que l’Albertine d’autrefois, invisible à moi-même, était pourtant enfermée au fond de moi comme aux « plombs » d’une Venise intérieure, dont parfois un incident faisait glisser le couvercle durci jusqu’à me donner une ouverture sur ce passé.

Ainsi par exemple un soir une lettre de mon coulissier rouvrit un instant pour moi les portes de la prison où Albertine était en moi vivante, mais si loin, si profond, qu’elle me restait inaccessible. (*ALR* IV:218)

While Derrida points out that ‘l’incorporation cryptique marque toujours un effet de deuil impossible ou refusé’,<sup>415</sup> Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok note that melancholia is apparent precisely when the walls of the crypt begin to crumble or ‘viennent à s’ébranler’.<sup>416</sup> Similarly, Proust’s protagonist re-experiences the terrible absence of Albertine when the ‘couvercle’ or doors of the prison are momentarily opened, through the action of involuntary memory. Albertine is both inside the protagonist, but distant from him, invisible, and resistant to his appropriating memory. Proust’s protagonist’s unconscious melancholic fidelity means that Albertine remains both living and, as she was in life, inaccessible and unknowable.<sup>417</sup> Moreover, as in life, Albertine may ostensibly be the protagonist’s prisoner, but the protagonist can make no claims to possession. In Derrida’s words:

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<sup>414</sup> ‘Fors’, p. 12.

<sup>415</sup> ‘Fors’, p. 25.

<sup>416</sup> Abraham and Torok, *L’Écorce et le noyau*, p. 273.

<sup>417</sup> On the crypt in the Venice episode, see Stefano Agosti, *Realtà e metafora: Indagini sulla ‘Recherche’* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1997), pp. 9-29, and Elsner, ‘Mourning and Creativity’, pp. 77-125 (Chapter II on ‘Mourning and the Uncanny Space’). Nicholas Royle’s study of *Wuthering Heights* in *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 28-62, is a brilliant example of how the concept of the crypt can help to unearth a text’s hidden meanings. See also Angela Moorjani, *The Aesthetics of Loss and Lessness* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 157-74.

Moi: gardien de cimetière. La crypte est enclose en lui, mais comme un lieu étranger, interdit, exclu. Il n'est pas le propriétaire de ce dont il a la garde. Il fait bien le tour du propriétaire, mais seulement le tour.<sup>418</sup>

A further important point of similarity between Proust and Derrida as regards mourning is its anachronistic temporality.<sup>419</sup> This anachronism relates in part to the intermittent rhythm of Proustian melancholia and of 'demi-deuil', although it is possible to distinguish a particular strand of anachronism, that of prolepsis, which both Proust and Derrida consider inevitable and highly formative for one's personality and experiences.<sup>420</sup> The equally important instance of analeptic or belated mourning of the grandmother (where the phrase 'intermittences du cœur' appears in the text) is treated in the Epilogue alongside Dante's *Vita nuova*.

Mourning always happens in anticipation, Derrida argues, since the possibility of loss haunts every relationship from its inception:

Je ne pourrais pas aimer d'amitié sans m'engager, *sans me sentir d'avance* engagé à aimer l'autre par-delà la mort. Donc par-delà la vie. Je me sens, et d'avance, avant tout contrat, *porté* à aimer l'autre mort.<sup>421</sup>

L'appréhension angoissée du deuil (sans laquelle l'acte d'amitié ne surgirait pas, dans son énergie même) s'insinue *a priori*, elle s'anticipe, elle hante, elle endeuille l'ami avant le deuil.<sup>422</sup>

Mourning is, in other words, not a consequence of friendship or love, but rather precedes, makes possible, and defines affection and subjectivity from the outset. It is this foundational significance of mourning in one's emotional life which allows Derrida to

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<sup>418</sup> 'Fors', p. 51.

<sup>419</sup> In a section entitled 'The Proustian Body between *Nachträglichkeit* and Anticipation', Elsner also situates Derridean mournful anachronism amidst Freud and Jean-Luc Nancy. See 'Mourning and Creativity', pp. 29–36. Jeremy Tambling considers Proust in *On Anachronism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 23–53.

<sup>420</sup> Gérard Genette highlights the importance and distinctiveness of prolepsis in Proust's narrative in *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 105–11, while Georges Cataui notes in *Proust et ses métamorphoses* (Paris: Nizet, 1972) that 'loin de ne voir en Proust que le génie de la rétrospection, je suis enclin à penser que son don essentiel était celui de l'anticipation, de la prophétie et du présage' (p. 13).

<sup>421</sup> Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié suivi de L'Oreille de Heidegger* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), p. 29.

<sup>422</sup> *Politiques de l'amitié*, p. 31.

declare ‘Je suis endeuillé donc je suis’.<sup>423</sup> Derrida’s intuition that mourning begins before actual loss might seem fairly obvious, but for the strangeness of placing not desire but mourning as the catalyst for emotional involvement. The notion of anticipated mourning can be charted back at least to St Augustine, who in book four of his *Confessions* reflecting on the death of a friend, writes:

Miser est omnis animus vinctus amicitia rerum mortalium, et dilaniatur, cum eas amittit, et tunc sentit miseriam, qua miser est et antequam amittat eas.

*Wretched is every soul that is bound fast in the friendship of mortal things; who becomes all to pieces when he forgoes them, and then first he becomes sensible of his misery, by which he is already miserable even before he forgoes them.*<sup>424</sup>

A direct Augustinian influence on Derridean anticipated mourning is, in fact, more than likely, given Derrida’s profound knowledge of this writer, particularly as revealed in ‘Circonfession’.<sup>425</sup> Yet Derrida and Augustine part ways in that for the former it is anticipated mourning for a mortal being which alone causes grief, whereas for the latter, anticipated mourning is only one, subsidiary reason for the inevitable unhappiness that friendships cause, the primary reason being, rather, the distraction that love of ‘rerum mortalium’ (*mortal things*) constitutes from ‘rerum immortalium’, i.e. God.<sup>426</sup>

Derrida’s observations are also original in that they associate this seemingly timeless emotional truth with a specific grammatical category, one which contributes to

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<sup>423</sup> See ‘Istrice 2. Ick bünn all hier’, interview with Maurizio Ferraris, in Jacques Derrida, *Points de suspension*, pp. 309–36, and especially pp. 330–2 as regards mourning (quotation from p. 331).

<sup>424</sup> Augustine, *Confessions: Books I–VIII*, trans. by William Watts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 164/5 (IV, vi).

<sup>425</sup> ‘Circonfession’, in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), pp. 5–291. See *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*, ed. by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>426</sup> These lines from Augustine perhaps reveal the common source of the ‘cosa mortale’ found in both Dante and Petrarch and discussed in Chapter Two.

Nicholas Royle's description of Derrida as 'a kind of magician of the future anterior'.<sup>427</sup>

In Derrida's words, anticipation 'endeuille chacun d'un implacable futur antérieur. L'un de nous deux *aura* dû rester seul, nous le savions tous deux d'avance. Et depuis toujours.'<sup>428</sup> As I show in due course as regards Orpheus and Eurydice, the proper name is, moreover, for Derrida, an important part of the anticipated experience of mourning, as it inscribes the named individual's death within itself: 'Il est d'avance le nom d'un mort'.<sup>429</sup> (In this respect Proust's protagonist's telephone call to the grandmother will be seen to be significant in combining explicitly the proper name with the anticipation of death.)

As for Derrida, so too in Proust love is predicated on a fear of loss and steeped in anticipated mourning. Moreover, Proust likewise employs the future perfect tense to convey this, moving from the specific narration of the death of the imaginary writer Bergotte to a universal view of apocalypse:

Il allait ainsi se refroidissant progressivement, petite planète qui offrait *une image anticipée* des derniers jours de la grande quand, peu à peu, la chaleur se retirera de la Terre, puis la vie. *Alors la résurrection aura pris fin*, car si avant dans les générations futures que brillent les œuvres des hommes, encore faut-il qu'il y ait des hommes. (*ALR* III:689, my emphases)<sup>430</sup>

On a more personal level, anticipated mourning is revealed to be at the root of Proust's protagonist's relationship with his mother and grandmother, as with Albertine. This is clear from the famous drama of the mother's denied goodnight kiss which, appropriately to its status as the founding moment in Proust's protagonist's subjectivity, comes right at

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<sup>427</sup> Nicholas Royle, *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. xii. Gunn associates the future anterior not with mourning but rather with jealousy in Proust, *Psychoanalysis and Fiction*, p. 151.

<sup>428</sup> Derrida, *Béliers*, p. 22.

<sup>429</sup> *Chaque fois unique*, p. 164.

<sup>430</sup> I consider this passage further in "'Alors la résurrection aura pris fin": Visions of the End in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*', in *Visions of Apocalypse: Representations of the End in French Literature and Culture*, edited by Leona Archer and Alex Stuart (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 153-164.

the start of the novel.<sup>431</sup> In this episode, there are two levels of anticipation at work; the ‘drame du coucher’ is both tremulously anticipated in itself, and an anticipation of the mother’s future death. In the first place, the young protagonist’s anticipation of having to say goodnight to his mother and be parted from her at night haunts his otherwise pleasant afternoons:

A Combray, tous les jours dès la fin de l’après-midi, longtemps avant le moment où il faudrait me mettre au lit et rester, sans dormir, loin de ma mère et de ma grand-mère, ma chambre à coucher redevenait le point fixe et douloureux de mes préoccupations. (*ALR* I:9)

The boy’s obsessive anticipatory self-tormenting is habitual and reenacted day after day, despite the uselessness of such fears to prevent or prepare him for the dreaded moment of separation. The experience is repeated without anything being able to be learnt from it.

The second level of anticipation concerns the significance of this episode, which seems to encourage Oedipal interpretations and at the very least stages the protagonist’s fear of his mother’s death figured by her absence from his bedside. The young boy’s fear of his own death is also revealed, as the act of going to bed is figured as that of burying himself alive: ‘Une fois dans ma chambre, il fallut boucher toutes les issues, fermer les volets, creuser mon propre tombeau, en défaisant mes couvertures, revêtir le suaire de ma chemise de nuit’ (*ALR* I:28). A letter of Proust to a friend can help to clarify what is at stake in the loss of the mother’s goodnight kiss:

Toute notre vie n’avait été qu’un entraînement, elle à m’apprendre à me passer d’elle pour le jour où elle me quitterait, et cela depuis mon enfance quand elle refusait de revenir dix fois me dire bonsoir avant d’aller en soirée.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> On the ‘drame du coucher’ as a scene of mourning, see Elsner, ‘Mourning and Creativity’, pp. 131–8.

<sup>432</sup> *Corr.* VI, p. 28, letter 6 to Maurice Barrès, [vers le 19 janvier 1906].

As in Dante's *Vita nuova*, where the loss of Beatrice's greeting is an anticipation of the further loss that her death entails, for Proust the loss of the goodnight kiss is explicitly an attempt, however ultimately fruitless, to prepare for future, eternal separation.<sup>433</sup>

Moreover, it is important to note the role that writing plays in the 'drame du coucher'.<sup>434</sup> Having written to his mother to call her to his bedside, the narrator relates the joy his young self felt: 'Maintenant je n'étais plus séparé d'elle ; les barrières étaient tombées, un fil délicieux nous réunissait' (*ALR* I:30). Yet the protagonist's faith in the power of writing to summon the loved object is severely undermined since, as Françoise returns to inform him, '« Il n'y a pas de réponse »' (*ALR* I:31). This *vignette* serves to highlight the solitude of the act of writing since joy at creating a bridge between the writing self and the absent one through written language is proven illusory and ill-founded. The bedtime drama is the cause of endless 'sanglots' which, the narrator recognises 'En réalité [...] n'ont jamais cessé' even if they are only intermittently audible (*ALR* I:36-7). This foundational childhood experience thus provides the melancholic *basso continuo* of the whole novel.

The 'drame du coucher' also sets the tone for the protagonist's relationship with Albertine. Her goodnight kiss is, for instance, explicitly paralleled with the mother's in the necessary comfort it affords the protagonist (e.g. *ALR* IV:520). Furthermore, the anticipated fear of losing Albertine forms a similarly key part of the protagonist's emotional attachment to her. This is nowhere more clear than in the 'comédie de rupture' (*ALR* III:854) or faked separation scene which the protagonist orchestrates in an

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<sup>433</sup> I discuss the greeting in Dante and Proust in 'Salut, salutation et rédemption: suggestions pour une lecture croisée de la *Recherche du temps perdu* et de la *Vita nuova* de Dante', in *Proust et le Moyen Âge* (forthcoming).

<sup>434</sup> See also Sanford Amas, 'The Ruse of a Condemned Man: First Writing in *A la recherche*', in *Reading Proust Now*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws and Eugène Nicole (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 47-54.

attempt to forestall any desire Albertine might have to leave him. The protagonist pretends to Albertine that he wants them to go their separate ways, in a secret bid to ensure her continuing devotion to him. Yet the consequences are unexpected and uncontrollable, for Albertine does pack her bags and leave of her own accord soon afterwards, and even at the time of the scene the protagonist loses sight of what is simulated and what is real. This latter confusion acts as a *mise en abîme* of the power of fiction in the novel and a blurring of the distinction between art and reality.

The scene is explicitly marked under the sign of anticipated mourning, the sincerity of which undermines the protagonist's mastery of the situation: 'je m'étais mis à anticiper le temps qui allait commencer le lendemain et qui durerait toujours, le temps où nous serions séparés' (*ALR* III:856). The protagonist is caught up in his own fantasy to such an extent that he becomes unable to distinguish fiction from reality: 'cette volonté de séparation que je simulais avec persévérance entraînait peu à peu pour moi quelque chose de la tristesse que j'aurais éprouvée si j'avais vraiment voulu quitter Albertine' (*ALR* III: 854); 'Cette scène de séparation fictive finissait par me faire presque autant de chagrin que si elle avait été réelle' (*ALR* III:856); 'il me semblait que j'avais presque autant de chagrin que si nous n'avions pas dû nous réconcilier tout à l'heure' (*ALR* III:857). This anticipation is natural given that separation is, sooner or later, inevitable: 'on sait qu'en simulant des adieux on évoque par anticipation une heure qui viendra fatalement plus tard' (*ALR* III:856). More worryingly, the emotional trauma of anticipated mourning is even to be revelled in as a symptom of self-indulgent fantasising, since 'On veut pleurer les larmes que [l'adieu] apportera bien avant qu'il survienne' (*ALR* III:855). Here we return to the notion, fully acknowledged by Petrarch (as I

explored in Chapter Two), that tears can be enjoyable, and that anticipated mourning can, strangely, be a pleasant, productive experience.

Nonetheless, the pretend break-up is also unnatural and counterproductive. It brings about the separation which the protagonist sought precisely to avoid, acting as a reminder that Albertine is beyond the protagonist's desire for a form of control which is authorial in its figuration. The recourse to the language of drama, theatre, and literature is especially prominent here. The episode requires a 'véritable mise en scène' (*ALR* III:861) and is a constant balancing act between the protagonist's own imagination (the 'roman que j'avais mis des millions de minutes à écrire', *ALR* III:852, and which he has created around Albertine's movements and motivations) and the unpredictability of Albertine herself who can obliterate this careful construction in a few words. In this respect the overwhelming effect this scene has on the protagonist seems to represent the power of literary language over the reader. Like the protagonist, the reader is ideally made to feel *for real* emotions which are by definition unreal and which exist – until that moment of readerly empathy – only on the page and in the author's imagination.<sup>435</sup> Proust's narrator crucially expresses awe and wonder at the irresistible, transformative power of language, giving as one possible explanation of the genuine grief this originally artificial and insincere scene inspired in him the suggestion that it is 'peut-être parce que les paroles tristes que l'on prononce, même mensongèrement, portent en elles leur tristesse et nous l'injectent profondément' (*ALR* III:856). This episode of explicit and self-fuelled anticipated mourning reveals the ability of untrue 'paroles tristes' (the

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<sup>435</sup> As Adam Watt comments on the juxtaposition of worlds real and novelistic in *Albertine disparue*, 'the reading of fiction [...] destabilizes the traditional distinctions between the intellectual and the empirical, between the real and the imaginary'. *Reading in Proust's 'A la recherche': 'le délire de la lecture'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 119.

language and literature of mourning) to provoke real grief in the speaker, and by extension in the listener (or reader) also.

Yet this recognition of the potency of anticipated mourning is set against an awareness of what Derrida would call 'l'inanticipable singularité de l'événement'.<sup>436</sup> Mourning is always already present from the start in every relationship, but the way in which this anticipated grief is ultimately fulfilled and retrospectively justified (by the death or departure of the loved one) is unforeseeable. Thus there is a strange conflict in the *Recherche* between anticipation and unpredictability. On the one hand, the novel insistently uses proleptic narration (even as clumsily as 'pour le cas où je n'aurais pas l'occasion d'y revenir, je noterai aussi que, deux ans plus tard', *ALR* IV:362), and emphasises the repetition of the past in the future (for instance the way Swann's relationship with Odette anticipates that of the protagonist with Gilberte and then Albertine).<sup>437</sup> On the other hand, from the very first volume the narrator warns the reader that 'l'absence d'une chose, [...] ce n'est pas un simple manque partiel, c'est un bouleversement de tout le reste, c'est un état nouveau qu'on ne peut prévoir dans l'ancien' (*ALR* I:300). This is borne out by the 'bouleversement' occasioned by Albertine's sudden and never fully anticipated although frequently feared departure:

L'idée du départ d'Albertine voulu par elle-même eût pu me venir mille fois à l'esprit, le plus clairement, le plus nettement du monde, que je n'aurais pas soupçonné davantage ce que serait relativement à moi, c'est-à-dire en réalité, ce départ, quelle chose originale, atroce, inconnue, quel mal entièrement nouveau. A ce départ, si je l'eusse prévu, j'aurais pu songer sans trêve pendant des années, sans que, mises bout à bout, toutes ces pensées eussent eu le plus faible rapport, non seulement d'intensité mais de ressemblance, avec l'inimaginable enfer dont Françoise m'avait levé le voile en me disant : « Mademoiselle Albertine est partie ». Pour se représenter une situation inconnue l'imagination emprunte des

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<sup>436</sup> 'Circonfession', p. 36.

<sup>437</sup> See Elisabeth Ladenson, 'Rereading Proust: Perversion and Prolepsis in *A la recherche du temps perdu*', in *Second Thoughts: A Focus on Rereading*, ed. by David Galef (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), pp. 249-65.

éléments connus et à cause de cela ne se la représente pas. Mais la sensibilité, même la plus physique, reçoit comme le sillon de la foudre, la signature originale et longtemps indélébile de l'événement nouveau. (*ALR* IV:8)

Mourning for Proust is anachronistic, uncontrollable, anticipated, and unexpected. Derridean anticipated mourning is prevalent in Proust and fundamental in its emotional charge, although it remains useless to mitigate or imagine truly the force of grief which the eventual actual loss occasions.

### *Mimetic mourning in Proust*

Griefs do not explain one another, but they may overlap.  
And so there is a complicity among the griefstruck.<sup>438</sup>

In the second half of this chapter I draw on René Girard's theory of mimetic or triangular desire as expounded in his *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* in order to organise an analysis of models of mourning in Proust's *Recherche*. Such a discussion is important because it helps to move towards a conclusion by illustrating how the language of mourning cannot function in a vacuum, but is constantly in dialogue with surrounding mournful linguistic exemplars, whether those provided by other characters in the novel, or by a preceding tradition of texts, which the author can choose as models or anti-models for his or her own melancholic enterprise. It is worth noting from the outset that Jean Starobinski, discussing Montaigne, identifies the recourse to quotation of established texts and models as a particularly melancholic trait, asking rhetorically:

Par quel privilège, plus que d'autres paroles, les sentences de la réflexion mélancolique se propagent-elles au cours des âges, enchaînant auteurs et lecteurs, qui les lisent et les prononcent à tour de rôle ? Devrions-nous considérer le

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<sup>438</sup> Barnes, *Levels of Life*, p. 72.

recours à la citation [...] comme une conséquence de l'autodépréciation mélancolique ? Parler par la voix vigoureuse de Sénèque ou de Plutarque, faute d'un langage personnel assez fort : telle est l'excuse de Montaigne, pour emprunts qui font en même temps office de parure. La citation, aveu de faiblesse, récite avec prédilection les discours de la mélancolie.<sup>439</sup>

Although the melancholic can also be interpreted, as in Kristeva's *Soleil noir* for instance, as in search of a personal, unique language, the premise that there is a particularly strong link between melancholia and intertextuality should be borne in mind throughout this section. Indeed, the troubling presence of a quoted intertext in a work can be interpreted according to the psychoanalytical crypt. That is, the quotation is part of the text, but separate from it, retaining its foreignness and resisting assimilation, and simultaneously being paradoxically closed and open to dialogue.<sup>440</sup>

In brief, Girard argues that our choice of love object is not spontaneous or free, but is always mediated by a rival, creating a love triangle. Love is not a direct emotion from lover to beloved, but takes an indirect path via a third point, the mediating rival who identifies the loved object as desirable and worth pursuing. In this Girard is following a Freudian model of the Oedipal love triangle that is considered foundational in the child's relationship to the world and the other. Yet unlike Freud, Girard makes a crucial distinction between two types of mediation in mimetic desire, external and internal mediation:

Nous parlerons de *médiation externe* lorsque la distance est suffisante pour que les deux sphères de *possibles* dont le médiateur et le sujet occupent chacun le centre ne soient pas en contact. Nous parlerons de *médiation interne* lorsque

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<sup>439</sup> Jean Starobinski, *Montaigne en mouvement* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p. 17.

<sup>440</sup> See Nicholas Royle, *After Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 145, and Nicholas Rand, 'Translator's Introduction: Towards a Cryptonomy of Literature', in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonomy*, trans. by Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. li-lxix. Rand suggests that the crypt can be seen as 'an allegory of deconstruction' in relationship to the texts interrogated (p. lxviii).

cette même distance est assez réduite pour que les deux sphères pénètrent plus ou moins profondément l'une dans l'autre.<sup>441</sup>

In other words, external mediation involves two wholly separate spheres, such as the interaction between characters in one book and the characters in another book (or a different work of art), whereas internal mediation would involve interaction between characters within the same book. A well-known example of external mediation from Dante would be the love story of Paolo and Francesca, which is facilitated and inspired by a book, the tale of Guinevere and Lancelot (*Inf.V.133-6*).<sup>442</sup>

Proust's writing is a key source for Girard's evidence of his theory at work in literature, but my point is that Girard's theory can account not only for desire, but also for mourning in the *Recherche*, so that models of grief in Proust's novel can be divided into examples of internal mimetic mourning (a character's mourning in relation to other characters who also mourn) and external mimetic mourning (a character's mourning in relation to mournful characters outside of the novel, i.e. in other books, plays, operas, etc.). Unlike Girardian mimetic desire, this mediation does not designate the object to be mourned, although it still dictates the manner in which the relationship (whether of love or grief) to the object is established. Hence, although the object is not negotiable (even if he/she may well have already been elected through mimetic desire, as Girard has shown in Proust), a further stage of mediation remains in which the experience of mourning is influenced, either affirmatively, through imitation of, or negatively, through a reaction against the mediating model. In this sense, we would, in truth, have to differentiate between mimesis as more straightforward imitation and mimesis as imitation by way of negation or opposition, whereas Girard is only really concerned with the

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<sup>441</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, p. 23.

<sup>442</sup> See Girard, *Critique dans un souterrain* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1976), pp. 177-85.

former. In each example drawn from the *Recherche*, it is therefore necessary to assess the narrator's position in respect of the examples of mourning, that is, to decide whether this is a position of approval or disapproval, in order to reach an understanding of the ideal model of mourning envisioned in the novel. Moreover, in the case of external mimetic mourning, the question of intertextuality is raised more generally, and the relationship between Dante, Petrarch, and Proust, in terms of such external aesthetic mediation, is considered. The hypothesis that Proust, whether consciously or coincidentally, is imitative of Dante by way of difference, whereas he is imitative of Petrarch by way of similarity is one that is tested in this chapter.

In the *Recherche* in general, society acts as a negative or anti-heroic mediating model of mourning. Mourners in society are frequently explicitly condemned for their lack of true feeling and for their superficial, shallow engagement with death. Social mourning is all about external form, not inner feelings, hence the emphasis on wearing the right clothes, a concern which unites the whole social spectrum from Mme de Marsantes (*ALR* II:547) to Françoise (*ALR* II:631). Mourning is clearly defined in terms of how long it should last (as manifested by the period mourning garb is to be worn), and also in terms of a hierarchy that says more about how well-connected the mourner and the deceased are, than the actual, affective relationship between the two. The treatment of Swann is emblematic. Firstly, the duc and duchesse de Guermantes are more concerned with matters of matching dress and footwear (the infamous red shoes, *ALR* II:883-4) than reacting to the news of Swann's imminent demise. Then, after his death, Odette's remarriage to Forcheville and Gilberte's taking of her adoptive father's name (*ALR* IV:154-5) seal his fate of being erased from society and collective memory.

In the final volume, the First World War does not so much change society's attitude to death, as render more transparent and unashamed an unfeeling, self-centred response that had already been seen to be the social norm. As mourning becomes more frequent during the war, mourning customs markedly decline and are shortened in length and extravagance (*ALR* IV:348). More shockingly, it is acknowledged that the omnipresence of death reduces survivors to a self-preserving indifference: 'la mort de millions d'inconnus nous chatouille à peine et presque moins désagréablement qu'un courant d'air' (*ALR* IV:351). Mme Verdurin, predictably given her attitude to deaths closer to her, is unmoved providing she can have her croissant – on prescription because of rationing – with her morning newspaper detailing the rising numbers of lives lost (*ALR* IV:352).<sup>443</sup>

The protagonist's attitude towards his deceased friends stands in opposition to the cruel and selfish forgetfulness of society. He continues, for instance, unlike Gilberte or Odette, to remember Swann and to compare his life experiences with that of his older *alter ego*. Yet the protagonist is not always the lone, exemplary, faithful mourner. Instead, elements of rivalry in the Proustian experience of mourning render the proposal of a Girardian mimetic mourning even more persuasive. As in love, Proust suggests that in grief there is often a mediating rival, a figure who by his or her very attractiveness is simultaneously perceived as a threat to one's own claims and a model to emulate. For instance, in the case of the death of the grandmother, the protagonist experiences a certain amount of guilt that his 'chagrin' is not 'aussi profond que celui de [sa] mère' (*ALR* III:165). After Albertine's death, meanwhile, the protagonist is, in contrast, comforted by the knowledge that he is a more faithful mourner than Albertine's closest

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<sup>443</sup> On this episode, see Colin Nettlebeck, 'History, Art and Madame Verdurin's Croissants: The War Episode in *Le Temps retrouvé*', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 19 (1982), 288-94.

friend and his rival Andrée, who ‘semblait avoir pris aisément son parti d’une séparation définitive’ and considers Albertine replaceable rather than ‘indispensable, unique’ (*ALR* iv:127).

Yet more than internal mimetic mourning, external mimetic mourning – the comparison of the protagonist’s experience of grief with artistic models outside of the novel – is central to the *Recherche*. Many of the protagonist’s experiences are explicitly mediated via works of art. The *Recherche* is a book that is saturated with references to music, the visual arts, sculpture, architecture, poetry, and other novels, and although it is striking that *Albertine disparue* has been calculated to be the volume with the least number of artistic comparisons,<sup>444</sup> the sphere of mourning is not always, in Proust, an exception to this general rule of artistic mediation. Comparisons with established, celebrated, exemplary expressions of mourning frequently act as mediators for the protagonist’s experience of loss. Strikingly, two of the key mediating texts in Proust – the Orpheus myth and the Old Testament book of Lamentations – are also central to the language of mourning in Dante and Petrarch. This communal, collective, shared, public language of mourning means that in fact mourning does remain social, despite Philippe Ariès’s assertions to the contrary,<sup>445</sup> although this dialogue is now carried out less through specific rites (mourning dresses and so forth) and more through culture, whether through literary or religious language.

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<sup>444</sup> Michèle M. Magill, *Répertoire des références aux arts et à la littérature dans ‘A la recherche du temps perdu’ de Marcel Proust suivi d’une analyse quantitative et narrative* (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1991), p. 152.

<sup>445</sup> For Philippe Ariès, the twentieth century and in particular the two World Wars have seen a marked change in attitudes towards mourning, from the typically social, ritualised, public expressions of grief codified in previous societies, to the more personal, introspective experiences of discrete individuals, accompanied by a public taboo on the subject of death and mourning. In this he sees a failure of modern culture to help the individual come to terms with mortality. See his *Essais sur l’histoire de la mort en Occident: du moyen âge à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) and *L’Homme devant la mort* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).



### *Mourning the name: The Orpheus myth*

Al triste lamento di Orfeo, che Virgilio e Ovidio si limitano a descrivere senza farlo udire a noi lettori (tranne la straziante invocazione del nome dell'amata), danno corpo e voce personale i poeti moderni.<sup>446</sup>

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice is one of the most important external mediating models of mourning with seemingly timeless, universal appeal. Its Classical sources are to be found principally in Virgil and Ovid, and it is to these authors that Dante, Petrarch, and Proust turn in differing measures.

In brief, the story is one of loss. Orpheus's wife Eurydice is mortally bitten by a snake (in Virgil's version, as she flees a man, Aristaeus, making inappropriate advances towards her; in Ovid's version it is merely an accident). Orpheus is inconsolable after her death and goes down to the Underworld to seek her out, charming the chthonic guards with his song as he goes. His music is so moving that he is able to bring Eurydice back with him, on one condition: that he not turn around to look at her until they are back on safe, living ground. Of course, Orpheus cannot resist turning back to check that she is following him – the sight of his beloved is irresistible despite the warning – and so she recedes back into the Underworld and is lost once more. The tale calls into question the power of art to overcome death and loss, particularly with its various endings. In Virgil's *Georgics*, as I consider in due course, Orpheus is dismembered for his fidelity to the memory of Eurydice, and he dies with her name on his lips. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, however, a further, happier ending is envisaged, as the conjugal pair are reunited in the Underworld:

Umbra subit terras, et quae loca viderat ante,

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<sup>446</sup> Francesco Giusti, 'Le parole di Orfeo: Dante, Petrarca, Leopardi, e gli archetipi di un genere', *Italian Studies*, 64:1 (Spring 2009), 56-76 (p. 56).

cuncta recognoscit quaerensque per arva piorum  
invenit Eurydicen cupidisque amplexitur ulnis;  
hic modo coniunctis spatiantur passibus ambo,  
nunc praecedentem sequitur, nunc praevisus anteit  
Eurydicenque suam iam tuto respicit Orpheus.

*The poet's shade fled beneath the earth, and recognized all the places he had seen before; and, seeking through the blessed fields, found Eurydice and caught her in his eager arms. Here now side by side they walk; now Orpheus follows her as she precedes, now goes before her, now may in safety look back upon his Eurydice.*<sup>447</sup>

Beyond the literal sequence of events, allegorical readings of the myth abound from the early Middle Ages onwards. One particularly strong strand of Orphic interpretation in the Middle Ages saw Orpheus as a Christ-like figure, while Eurydice was often considered a second Eve who represented excessive attachment to earthly things (as symbolised in the forbidden backward glance, which stands in contrast to having one's eyes firmly fixed forwards and upwards, towards God). This second line – the denigration of Eurydice – is taken by Boethius in his *De consolazione philosophiae*, although it was to be popular throughout the Middle Ages, culminating in Pierre Bersuire's *Ovide moralisé*.<sup>448</sup> While it is true that at one time a particular reading of the myth may have prevailed over another, the contrasting treatments of the myth undertaken by pairs of writers such as Virgil and Ovid, or Dante and Petrarch who are close in time yet so disparate in their vision of Orpheus reveal that each writer's relationship to the poet is irreducibly individual. As Ann Wroe notes in her particularly elegant survey of Orphic traditions, 'To some degree you could argue that each age

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<sup>447</sup> *Met.* 11.61–6 (II, pp. 124/5). A further particularity of the Ovidian and Virgilian story is that Orpheus is linked to homosexuality, an aspect which would seem to lend itself to a Proustian comparison but that the Orpheus myth in the *Recherche* is employed only in a male-female context (the relationship between the protagonist and his grandmother). See, nonetheless, John F. Makowski, 'Bisexual Orpheus: Pederasty and Parody in Ovid', *The Classical Journal*, 92:1 (October–November 1996), 25–38.

<sup>448</sup> See John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), and also Bruce W. Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 295–343.

revisits him. Yet none puts its stamp on him definitively, because the young man with the lyre is different for everyone who meets him. Each encounter makes him anew.<sup>449</sup> In this respect, the Orpheus story is an especially fascinating lens through which to highlight the different approaches to loss found in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust.

In the *Commedia*, as I noted in Chapter One, Dante-pilgrim's mourning at Virgil's sudden, irrevocable disappearance is mediated by the Virgilian story of Orpheus and Eurydice, via the triple repetition of Virgil's name (*Purg.XXX.49-51*).<sup>450</sup> Since Orpheus himself is in Limbo (*Inf.IV.140*), a further level of irony is introduced. Virgil, author of the *Georgics*, in which the story of Orpheus is recounted, is going to join his tragic character (Orpheus) in Limbo in a reenactment that has Virgil now as a lost Eurydice and Dante-pilgrim as a temporary lamenting Orpheus who will, however, go on to be reunited with his own beloved, Beatrice, in an overthrowing and reversal of the tragic tale. Robert Hollander perceptively interprets this episode as Dante's final rejection of pagan culture, which is necessarily tragic (as evidenced by the Virgilian story of Orpheus, as by Virgil's own fate in the *Commedia*) and which therefore needs to be relinquished and, however heartrendingly, consigned to Hell in the context of Dante's Christian comedy. Hollander comments: 'Così è ricordato Virgilio nel momento in cui lascia il poema dantesco, circondato da memorie del mondo pagano intrise di perdita e fallimento.'<sup>451</sup>

At the end of *Purgatorio* Dante enacts both the tragic and the happy endings of the Orpheus tale, with the tragic and irreversible loss of Virgil counterbalanced by reunion with Beatrice. Zygmunt Barański suggests that Dante's sparse references to

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<sup>449</sup> Ann Wroe, *Orpheus: The Song of Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>450</sup> On this passage and its various Classical subtexts, see Rachel Jacoff, 'Intertextualities in Arcadia: *Purgatorio* 30.49-51', in *The Poetry of Allusion*, pp. 131-44.

<sup>451</sup> Robert Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco: Tragedia nella 'Commedia'* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1983), p. 133.

Orpheus reveal Dante's desire to dissimulate the strong parallels between each poet's *descensus ad inferos*,<sup>452</sup> while Hollander also notes Orpheus's 'surprising absence' given that 'as poet who made a descent into Hell he was a natural "figure" of Dante himself'.<sup>453</sup> The parallel is, however, undermined, for Dante's reunion with Beatrice is made possible through his divinely sanctioned poetry that results from his journey through the Afterlife, and is ultimately a success story. In the version of events that Dante-author promotes, the pilgrim is a new, more humble Orpheus journeying through the Underworld; his reunion with Beatrice depends not on him or his poetry, but rather on grace and divine intercession. It is even possible to argue, in reverse, that Beatrice has an Orphic role in rescuing Dante-Eurydice from the dark wood.<sup>454</sup> Yet that the eventual purgatorial reunion happens precisely in Dante's own poetry highlights the audacity of such claims and of the delegating of responsibility (whether to God or Beatrice), and places the *Commedia* as one of the more successful and confident rewritings of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. In Dante's rewriting, poetry can and does allow for eternal reunion with the beloved, *pace* Virgil's tragic version. Jorge Luis Borges's assertion, however reductive, that Dante constructed the whole poem 'in order to insert [the] encounter' with Beatrice into it cannot be easily dismissed.<sup>455</sup>

Moreover, Dante-pilgrim crucially does not look back when he enters Purgatory. The angelic guard warns in a reenactment of Orpheus's tempted backwards glance "Intrate; ma facciovi accorti | che di fuor torna chi 'n dietro si guata" (*Purg.*IX.131-2),

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<sup>452</sup> See Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Notes on Dante and the Myth of Orpheus', in *Dante, mito e poesia*, pp. 133-54 (p. 135). See also, more recently, Andrew Frisardi, 'Dante, Orpheus, and the Poem as Salutation', *Temenos Academy Review*, 12 (Autumn 2009), 116-39.

<sup>453</sup> Hollander, *Studies in Dante*, p. 88, n. 100. A similar view (that of surprise at Dante's omission) is expressed by Giorgio Padoan in his entry for 'Orfeo' in *ED*, IV, p. 192.

<sup>454</sup> See, for instance, Nathaniel Tarn, *The Embattled Lyric: Essays and Conversations in Poetics and Anthropology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 164.

<sup>455</sup> See Jorge Luis Borges, *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986*, ed. by Eliot Weinberger, trans. by Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 300.

and Dante-poet wonders as he passes the test with his eyes firmly forward-facing, ‘s’io avesse li occhi vòlti ad essa, | qual fora stata al fallo degna scusa?’ (*Purg.X.5-6*). In this Dante aligns himself with Boethius’s retelling of the myth which highlights the sinfulness of looking back to Hell when one should be looking forward to God. Boethius’s verse account of the myth ends with the important moralising gloss:

Vos haec fabula respicit  
 Quicumque in superum diem  
 Mentem ducere quaeritis.  
 Nam qui Tartareum in specus  
 Victus lumina flexerit,  
 Quidquid praecipuum trahit  
 Perdit, dum videt inferos.

*To you this tale refers,  
 Who seek to lead your mind  
 Into the upper day;  
 For he who overcome should turn back his gaze  
 Towards the Tartarean cave,  
 Whatever excellence he takes with him  
 He loses when he looks on those below.*<sup>456</sup>

In a similar manner, Stefano Carrai has discussed the end of the *Vita nuova*, and in particular the sonnet ‘Oltre la spera’, in which Dante’s sigh does not descend but rather ascends to Heaven following Beatrice, as antithetical to the Orpheus myth.<sup>457</sup> Dante’s Christian contemplation of the glorified Beatrice is a stark contrast to Orpheus’s pagan refusal of death and excessive attachment to the body of his beloved, which can be seen to be symbolised by his descent to bring her back to Earth.

While Orpheus is an anti-model for Dante, he seems to be for Petrarch a model to which to aspire, even if in practice imitation is neither possible nor successful. For Petrarch, as Nicola Gardini has argued convincingly, it is the Virgilian version of the

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<sup>456</sup> Boethius, *Theological Tractates; The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. by H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, and S.J. Tester (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 310/11 (III, xii, 52-8).

<sup>457</sup> Stefano Carrai, *Dante elegiaco: Una chiave di lettura per la ‘Vita nova’* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2006), p. 74.

myth that has the greatest hold on his imagination,<sup>458</sup> and I cite here the relevant lines from book IV of the *Georgics* in which Orpheus's dismembered head continues to repeat the name of Eurydice:

'Tum quoque marmorea caput a cervice revulsum  
gurgite cum medio portans Oeagrius Hebrus  
volverte, Eurydicen vox ipsa et frigida lingua,  
a miseram Eurydicen! anima fugiente vocabat:  
Eurydicen toto referebant flumine ripae.'

*'And even when Oeagrian Hebrus rolled in midcurrent that head, severed from its marble neck, the disembodied voice and the tongue, now cold for ever, called with departing breath on Eurydice – ah, poor Eurydice! 'Eurydice' the banks re-echoed, all along the stream.'*<sup>459</sup>

In this passage, language – and the proper name more specifically – is clearly a marker of loss, and the passage is reproduced by Petrarch in the *Trionfi* in the lines: 'vidi colui che sola Euridice ama, | e lei segue a l'inferno e, per lei morto, | con la lingua già fredda ancho la chiama'.<sup>460</sup>

In the *Canzoniere*, Petrarch explicitly states his desire to use his poetry to Orphic effect: 'Or avess'io un sì pietoso stile | che Laura mia potesse tôrre a Morte, | come Euridice Orpheo sua senza rima' (*RVF* 332.49-51). The use of the imperfect subjunctive, however, casts doubt on the possibility of such a mission, while the distinction that Orpheus was able to reach Eurydice 'senza rima' is ambiguous but significant. The most likely interpretation is that this phrase refers to the fact that Classical poetry is unrhymed, thereby drawing a distinction between Orpheus's much more elevated and moving language and Petrarch's own, rhyming vernacular, a

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<sup>458</sup> See Nicola Gardini, 'Un esempio di imitazione virgiliana nel *Canzoniere* petrarchesco: Il mito di Orfeo', *Modern Language Notes*, 110 (1995), 132-44 (p. 140). For a reading of the Ovidian elements of the Orpheus myth in Petrarch, see instead, Federica Brunori, 'Il mito ovidiano di Orfeo e Euridice nel *Canzoniere* di Petrarca', *Romance Quarterly*, 44 (1997), 233-44.

<sup>459</sup> Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid 1-6*, pp. 256/7 (vv. 523-7).

<sup>460</sup> *Trionfi, rime estravaganti, codice degli abbozzi*, p. 184, vv. 13-15 of *Triumphus cupidinis* IV.

distinction which reflects Petrarch's frequently derogatory attitude towards the vernacular.<sup>461</sup> In *RVF* 294, the line 'non è chi lor ['Amor' and the lyric subject's 'alma', but also, homonymically, Laura] duol rconti o scriva' (v. 8), following on from the reference to 'romper un sasso' (v. 7), might similarly be interpreted as pointing to the absence of an Orphic figure in the *Canzoniere*.

While Dante interprets the Orpheus myth morally, Petrarch is more attracted by its implications for the art of poetry, although the understanding of the myth as a warning against excessive attachment to the past is raised in the *Secretum* by the figure of Augustinus.<sup>462</sup> As I showed in Chapter Two, Petrarch's constant backwards gaze towards a vanishing, absent Laura is important evidence of his Orphic self-identification as well as a point of contrast with Dante.<sup>463</sup> Here, I argue instead that it is above all the repetition of the name of the beloved in her absence that produces the identification of Petrarch's lyric subject with Orpheus. As in Virgil's version, in the *Canzoniere* the repetition of the name is a source of poetry and pathos, but cannot achieve the desired effect of reunion or re-presentation. Such repetition is what remains of the love story and immortalises the lovers in poetry, but fails to bring about a happy ending to the story.

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<sup>461</sup> As noted by Santagata (p. 1303, notes to vv. 50-1 of *RVF* 332).

<sup>462</sup> 'Ne forte cum Orpheo ad inferis rediens retroque respiciens recuperatam perdas Euridicem' (*Secretum*, p. 172); 'You wouldn't want to suffer in the same way as Orpheus who, when he came back out of Hades, looked behind and lost Eurydice after he had just regained her' (*MSB*, p. 74).

<sup>463</sup> See also Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, p. 221.

## *Eurydice and the proper name in Petrarch and Proust*

‘What’s in a name?’<sup>464</sup>

The focus on the proper name in the story of Orpheus and Eurydice can benefit from a Derridean interpretation, as it is through the repetition of the name of a loved absent one that the myth comes through most forcefully and emotively in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust. In fact, Proust seems to declare explicitly that a point of convergence with himself and Petrarch is repetition of the proper name. To Madame de Chevigné, Proust writes not only that ‘l’éternelle histoire de Pétrarque et de Laure prend toutes les formes, mais reste vraie’,<sup>465</sup> but also that:

Je ne vous écris pas mais je n’écris que sur vous. Tout mon prochain volume est sur vous. [...] Ainsi je ne peux rien écrire qui ne répète comme dans la poésie de Lamartine le nom de ‘Laure’. Je ne me crois pas hélas Pétrarque pour cela, mais je garde la trace ineffaçable de minutes enchantées.<sup>466</sup>

This last passage reveals a dense interplay of references. It should first be noted that Madame de Chevigné, whose fuller name reads Comtesse Adhéaume de Chevigné, née Laure de Sade, claimed to be descended from none other than Petrarch’s Laura via the Marquis de Sade.<sup>467</sup> In this sense it is only natural that Proust should want to identify himself in his letters to her, if only cavalierly rather than in all seriousness, with Petrarch as a poet faithful to a supremely beautiful, new Laura. Secondly, Proust states here that Madame de Chevigné is a model for the duchesse de Guermantes (the ‘prochain volume’ is the *Côté de Guermantes*). Thirdly, it is notable that Petrarch is mediated for

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<sup>464</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II. 2. 43, in *Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 948–85 (p. 960).

<sup>465</sup> *Corr.* XX, p. 473, letter 277, [vers septembre 1921].

<sup>466</sup> *Corr.* XIX, p. 527, letter 278, [octobre 1920].

<sup>467</sup> See the entry for Chevigné (Laure, comtesse de) by N. Mauriac Dyer in *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, pp. 209–11, and Marthe Bibesco, *La Duchesse de Guermantes: Laure de Sade, comtesse de Chevigné* (Paris: Plon, 1950). It is also worth noting that the abbé de Sade, the Marquis’s uncle, wrote a biography of Petrarch in 3 vols, *Mémoires pour la vie de Francis Pétrarque* (Amsterdam: Arskée & Mercus, 1764–67).

Proust not only socially (by the exalted lineage of his addressee) but also artistically, by Lamartine. In the third of the *Méditations poétiques*, ‘A Elvire’, Lamartine writes ‘Vaucluse a retenu le nom chéri de Laure’,<sup>468</sup> no doubt thinking of poems such as *RVF* 146 in which Petrarch desires to fill ‘tutte et quattro | parti del mondo’ with Laura’s name (vv.12-13), or *RVF* 97 in which he writes ‘solo del suo nome | vo empiendo l’aere, che sì dolce sona’ (*RVF* 97.10-11). Lamartine even wrote a critical work on Petrarch in which he considers Petrarch as an intellectual, Platonic poet and describes Vaucluse in great detail.<sup>469</sup> Lamartine unambiguously declares ‘je considère Pétrarque, sans aucune comparaison possible, comme le plus parfait poète de l’âme de tous les temps et de tous les pays, depuis la mort du doux Virgile’.<sup>470</sup> It seems likely that any knowledge Proust may have had of Petrarch would have been mediated by Lamartine’s devotion for the Italian poet.

The repetition of the name of Laura is endless and constant throughout Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, given the proliferation of common nouns which spring from her proper name (‘alloro’, ‘lauro’, ‘l’aura’, ‘or’, ‘ora’, ‘oro’, and so on).<sup>471</sup> Yet while such semantic richness is developed from Laura’s name, the Orphic backdrop at the same time indicates that the name signifies an absence, as the passage from Virgil’s *Georgics* clearly reveals. Just as Orpheus is left stripped of his own life yet still clinging to the name of Eurydice, Petrarch’s lyric subject laments, after Laura’s death, ‘né di sé m’à

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<sup>468</sup> Alphonse de Lamartine, *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. by Marius-François Guyard (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), pp. 12-13, line 3.

<sup>469</sup> Alphonse de Lamartine, *Trois poètes italiens: Dante, Pétrarque, Le Tasse* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1893), particularly, on Petrarch, pp. 97-218.

<sup>470</sup> *Trois poètes italiens*, p. 100.

<sup>471</sup> See, for instance, Cesare Segre, ‘Les Isotopies de Laure’, in *Exigences et perspectives de la sémiotique: Recueil d’hommages pour Algirdas Julien Greimas*, ed. by Herman Parret and Hans-George Ruprecht, 2 vols (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1985), II, pp. 811-26.

lasciato altro che 'l nome' (*RVF* 291.14).<sup>472</sup> Indeed, for Proust, this situation often even precedes death: 'Un nom, c'est tout ce qui reste bien souvent pour nous d'un être, non pas même quand il est mort, mais de son vivant' (*ALR* IV:545). Eurydice, Laura, and Albertine are reduced in life as in death to names to which their respective lovers cling in writing and words. In particular, poetry comes to be synonymous with Laura's proper name for Petrarch. And, as Giuseppe Mazzotta has highlighted, Laura – and by extension Petrarch's poetry – is inherently unstable, as 'words become generative of all possible other words',<sup>473</sup> so that:

In a real sense, the paradigms of the poet's voice are Echo and Orpheus: Echo, the maiden who loves Narcissus and whose love is not returned, is damned to repeat sounds and exist as pure voice, while her body by the mercy of the gods is changed to stone. Orpheus, the poet who wishes to seduce death and recover Eurydice by his song, loses Eurydice. Their voices, like Petrarch's, speak their losses and are veritable allegories of a presence which the self, caught in the riddle of language, can never recover.<sup>474</sup>

It is notable that in the passage from the *Georgics*, Orpheus's repetition of Eurydice's name is explicitly connected with an echo effect.

In Proust, a similar tragic encounter with the emptiness and detachment of the name is depicted when the protagonist is on the telephone to his grandmother, and finds himself repeating her name (in the form of her familial status) desperately in her physical absence:

Je criais: « Grand-mère, grand-mère », et j'aurais voulu l'embrasser; mais je n'avais près de moi que cette voix, fantôme aussi impalpable que celui qui reviendrait peut-être me visiter quand ma grand-mère serait morte. [...] Il me semblait que c'était déjà une ombre chérie que je venais de laisser se perdre parmi les ombres, et seul devant l'appareil, je continuais à répéter en vain : « Grand-mère, grand-mère », comme Orphée, resté seul, répète le nom de la morte. (*ALR* II:434)

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<sup>472</sup> On Laura's name in sonnet 291, see François Rigolot, 'Nature and Function of Paronomasia in the *Canzoniere*', *Italian Quarterly*, 18 (1974), 29–36.

<sup>473</sup> Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 78.

<sup>474</sup> Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, p. 79.

As with Petrarch's engagement with the Orpheus myth as the sound of absence and loss, Proust too, harking back to the Virgilian model, is equally enthralled by the example of the useless but endless repetition of the name.<sup>475</sup> The telephone call in Proust's novel is a moment of temporary, physical separation from the grandmother which acts as an 'anticipation aussi d'une séparation éternelle' (*ALR* II:432). In this example of anticipated mourning, anticipation foresees but can neither prevent nor alleviate the suffering which the protagonist will experience after his grandmother's death, more than a year afterwards. Yet Proust's use of the myth is not only backward-facing (to Virgil), but also, as Sara Danius has noted, a forward-facing update of the story for 'the machine age', with its reference to the technology of the telephone.<sup>476</sup> In the words of Malcolm Bowie, with this Orphic passage no doubt partly in mind, 'The epic poet of the modern age cannot shy away from the low, the mechanical and the mundane. He must want them. He must want aeroplanes, searchlights, cars and telephones'.<sup>477</sup>

In earlier examples from the *Recherche*, much of the protagonist's relationship with Gilberte centres on repeating her name by himself to himself:

Certes, à toutes les pages de mes cahiers, j'écrivais indéfiniment son nom et son adresse, mais à la vue de ces vagues lignes que je traçais sans qu'elle pensât pour cela à moi, qui lui faisaient prendre autour de moi tant de place apparente sans qu'elle fût mêlée davantage à ma vie, je me sentais découragé parce qu'elles ne me parlaient pas de Gilberte qui ne les verrait même pas, mais de mon propre désir qu'elles semblaient me montrer comme quelque chose de purement personnel, d'irréel, de fastidieux et d'impuissant. (*ALR* I:393)

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<sup>475</sup> On other implications of the Orpheus myth in Proust, see Pierre-Louis Rey, 'Proust et le mythe d'Orphée', in *Proust, la mémoire et la littérature: Séminaire 2006-2007 au Collège de France*, ed. by Antoine Compagnon (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006), pp. 75-94; and, concerning Swann and Odette, J. Lemaire, "'Dans le royaume sombre...'" (Étude suivie d'un texte de Marcel Proust), *L'Information littéraire*, 21 (1969), 92-100.

<sup>476</sup> See Sara Danius, 'Orpheus and the Machine: Proust as Theorist of Technological Change, and the Case of Joyce', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 37:2 (April 2001), 127-40 (p. 130).

<sup>477</sup> Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars*, p. 323.

Repeating the name of the absent loved one in writing is, here, considered to be ultimately ‘impuissant’, powerless to invoke or establish presence. Writing is, instead, a result of monomania, and a solipsistic exercise which, for all the focus on the name of the other, ends up speaking only of the writing subject’s own self-absorbed and unfulfilled desires.

Proust’s narrator repeats a similar point about the obsessive repetition of Gilberte’s name soon afterwards:

Je me rabattais sur les sujets qui touchaient encore à Gilberte, je rabâchais sans fin les mêmes paroles, et j’avais beau savoir que ce n’était que des paroles – des paroles prononcées loin d’elle, qu’elle n’entendait pas, des paroles sans vertu qui répétaient ce qui était, mais ne le pouvaient modifier – pourtant il me semblait qu’à force de manier, de brasser ainsi tout ce qui avoisinait Gilberte j’en ferais peut-être sortir quelque chose d’heureux. (*ALR* I:406-7)

Again, repetition of the loved one’s name and key attributes is ultimately pointless, ‘sans vertu’, as it does not achieve or change anything. Such repetition is descriptive not performative, or – in Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan’s terminology – destructive not constructive.<sup>478</sup> Similarly, after her death, Albertine is reduced to her name in the protagonist’s memory: ‘Pour Albertine elle-même, elle n’existait guère en moi que sous la forme de son nom’ (*ALR* IV:16). It is telling, with this quotation in mind, that the name Albertine has been calculated to appear 2,360 times throughout the *Recherche* as a whole.<sup>479</sup>

Strikingly, Proust’s narrator’s representation of the power of Albertine’s name draws on Petrarch’s elaboration of the associations of Laura’s name, particularly the homonymy of ‘l’aura’ (breeze). The narrator recalls ‘En la nommant sans cesse, je voulais enfin faire rentrer, comme un peu d’air, quelque chose d’elle dans cette chambre où son

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<sup>478</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, ‘The Paradoxical Status of Repetition’.

<sup>479</sup> Étienne Brunet, *Le Vocabulaire de Proust*, 3 vols (Geneva: Slatkine; Paris: Champion, 1983), I, p. 214.

départ avait fait le vide et où je ne respirais plus' (*ALR* IV:45). Here Albertine's name is explicitly connected with a Petrarchan aerial precedent ('un peu d'air'). Laura as 'aurora' (e.g. *RVF* 291) is also seemingly reflected in the description of how 'mon souvenir [...] ne faisait, comme une aurore boréale, que refléter après la mort d'Albertine le sentiment que j'avais eu pour elle, il était comme l'ombre de mon amour' (*ALR* IV:113). The most explicit moment of linguistic conflation of Albertine and Laura is, however, in the use of the word 'aura':

L'être ne meurt pas tout de suite pour nous, il reste baigné d'une espèce d'aura de vie qui n'a rien d'une immortalité véritable mais qui fait qu'il continue à occuper nos pensées de la même manière que quand il vivait. (*ALR* IV:92)

Although we cannot know that Proust would have deliberately scattered such Petrarchan echoes through his writing, it is interesting that these moments do cohere with the mourning for Laura which is, similarly, centred on survival through personal memory rather than 'immortalité véritable', as I discussed in Chapter Two. In the *Recherche*, an effect comparable to the fragmentation of Laura's name might be the distribution (*morcellement*, or even *marcellement*) of the letters of the first name of the author and (perhaps) of the protagonist-narrator, Marcel,<sup>480</sup> amongst many of the other characters (Charlus, Rachel, Morel, and so on), although this does not extend to common nouns in Proust, it seems, and so the effect is much more isolated than the omnipresence of the letters and syllables of the name of Petrarch's beloved.<sup>481</sup>

In the example of Orpheus, Petrarch, and Proust, repetition of the name does not bring back the loved one. Nor does it really substitute for their presence, but instead

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<sup>480</sup> On the ambiguity surrounding the narrator's almost self-naming, see Eugène Nicole, "'Quel Marcel" and Other Oddities of the Narrator's Designations in *A la recherche du temps perdu*', in *The Strange M. Proust*, ed. by André Benhaïm (London: Legenda, 2009), pp. 36–44.

<sup>481</sup> See Jean-François Reille, *Proust: le temps de désir* (Paris: Éditions français réunis, 1979), pp. 203–12, and Serge Gaubert, 'Le Jeu de l'alphabet', in *Recherche de Proust*, pp. 68–87.

emphasises their distance and absence. It is, thus, a repetition of loss, or a refusal of loss that perpetuates and sustains the loss experienced. Through repetition, the name becomes an empty signifier, which is reduced to the sonorous fragments of which it is composed. In contrast, in the *Commedia* the repeated assertion of Beatrice's self-identity ("Ben son, ben son Beatrice", *Purg.XXX.73*) associates naming with irrefutable presence. Beatrice becomes both Orpheus (rescuing Dante from the dark wood) and a Eurydice whose self-naming is much more potent than Dante's own earlier Orphic laments. In the *Vita nuova*, for instance, as discussed in Chapter Two, Dante's repetition of Beatrice's name after her death in poetry is comforting, but only temporarily so: 'Poscia piangendo, sol nel mio lamento | chiamo Beatrice, e dico: "Or se' tu morta?"; | e mentre ch'io la chiamo, me conforta' ('Li occhi dolenti', vv. 54-6, *VN XXXI*, 14). The named reunion with Beatrice in the Garden of Eden rewrites and attempts to replace not only Dante-pilgrim's impassioned repetition of the absent Virgil's name (*Purg.XXX.49-51*), but also these lines from the *Vita nuova*, by reasserting the deictic and living power of the name.<sup>482</sup>

The meditations of Petrarch and Proust on the proper name come close to Derrida's writings on the topic. Derrida highlights that 'le nom [...] est toujours et a priori un nom de mort'.<sup>483</sup> This is because the name can do without its bearer, and therefore has its own potential survival after the bearer's death inscribed within it. That this should be so perhaps seems counterintuitive, but this is only because we tend to place so much hope and emphasis on the name as carrier and expression of our

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<sup>482</sup> On the univocal, stable significance of Beatrice as the 'pienezza del nome', see Guglielmo Gorni, *Lettera nome numero: L'ordine delle cose in Dante* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), p. 31, Dino S. Cervigni, 'Beatrice's Act of Naming', *Lectura Dantis [virginiana]*, 8 (1991), 85-99, and Allen Mandelbaum, "'Taken from Brindisi": Vergil in an Other's Otherworld', in *Vergil at 2000: Commemorative Essays on the Poet and his Influence*, ed. by John D. Bernard (New York: AMS Press, 1986), pp. 225-39 (pp. 232-3).

<sup>483</sup> *L'Oreille de l'autre*, p. 18.

respective, unique identities, forgetting in the meantime that the name is not only an intrinsic, inextricable part of our selves, but is at the same time external, never wholly unique, and eminently detachable. The name's ability to refer to the named person in their absence anticipates the possibility of their death, when the name will continue to carry out its function of successfully pointing to an absence. The name is thus intimately associated with both the possibility of survival (the deceased will continue to be referred to) and the inevitability of death (the name can always do without the bearer). The name is tacitly hoped to act, in Derrida's words, as 'une police d'assurance contre la mort' although 'rien n'y est dès lors mieux écrit, plus lisible, que la mort de l'assuré.'<sup>484</sup>

The individuality of the name is further complicated by its status as a signifier and thence its position in a linguistic network within which its isolation, special status, and uniqueness are attacked. Like any other word, the proper name can be broken down into its constituent parts (syllables or even letters), and is liable to be contaminated by the common nouns to which it is close in terms of sound, spelling, or meaning. The 'nom propre' is, therefore, at once 'propre' (personal) and 'impropre' (impersonal). In *Signéponge* Derrida calls this overlapping of proper and common nouns within a text the 'monumentalisation pierreuse du nom'.<sup>485</sup> Instead of leaving the named presence at the title page (where the proper name is isolated and seemingly put on a pedestal), in the example Derrida uses Francis Ponge's name is fragmented and hidden throughout his writing, in the form of linguistic devices such as puns, echoes, anagrams, and hypograms. In this manner the name is both destroyed (fragmented) and preserved (omnipresent). Derrida declares in *L'Oreille de l'autre* that 'le nom propre secret est tout de suite,

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<sup>484</sup> Derrida, *Psyché: inventions de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), p. 384.

<sup>485</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Signéponge/Signsponge*, trans. by Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 27.

structuralement et *a priori*, inscrit dans un réseau qui le contamine de noms communs, de sorte que même ce nom propre secret serait impossible, du moins dans sa pureté.<sup>486</sup> Speaking of such contamination as a ‘monumentalisation pierreuse’ is particularly appropriate for Petrarch, whose very name, as already noted in Chapter Two, contains within it ‘petra’, stone, a fact which has repercussions for the representation of his lyric subject as a ‘petra’ and a ‘vivo et sbigottito sasso’ in *RVF* 23 (lines 82 and 80 respectively), as in other poems in the *Canzoniere*. Petrarch’s written treatment of Laura’s name acts, as I have already noted, in a similar, fragmentary way, for instance in *RVF* 5 with the dissemination of the syllables of Laura’s diminutive Latin name (‘Lau/re/ta’) throughout the sonnet. Through the associations of the proper name of Petrarch’s beloved with common nouns in Italian Laura comes to be identified with the laurel, gold, the breeze, and so forth.<sup>487</sup> Laura’s name is encrypted in the *Canzoniere*, which can therefore be said to act, in one Derridean definition of the crypt which is appropriately Petrarchan, as ‘un labyrinthe intérieur résonnant’.<sup>488</sup>

For Dante, ‘li nomi seguitino le nominate cose, sì come è scritto: “Nomina sunt consequentia rerum”’ (*VN* XIII, 4).<sup>489</sup> In such a scheme, names are indissociable from precise things and naming is a rendering present of the signified. The link between name and named object is not arbitrary, but necessary, since ‘speech [...] is an authentic sign of preexisting realities’.<sup>490</sup> Beatrice’s name signifies that she bestows beatitude, no less;

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<sup>486</sup> *L’Oreille de l’autre*, p. 142.

<sup>487</sup> See John Freccero, ‘The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch’s Poetics’, *Diacritics*, 5:1 (1975), 34–40, on Laura as a pure, self-referential signifier and therefore Petrarch’s love for her as idolatrous.

<sup>488</sup> ‘Fors’, p. 67. From a Proustian perspective, in contrast, see Bruce Stephen Watson, *Les Figures du labyrinthe dans ‘A la recherche du temps perdu’* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

<sup>489</sup> Bruno Nardi traces this maxim back to Roman law (the *Corpus iuris civilis*), although he resists reading too much significance into the comment. See his *Dante e la cultura medievale: Nuovi saggi di filosofia dantesca*, 2nd edn (Bari: Laterza & figli, 1949), pp. 218–25.

<sup>490</sup> Marcia L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 248.

she is ‘chiamata da molti Beatrice, li quali non sapeano che si chiamare’ (VN II, 1). Her name is not threatened by Petrarchan polysemy, even if Dante confesses in *Paradiso* to revere the constitutive syllables of her name (he is moved ‘pur per *Be* e per *ice*’, *Par.*VII.14).<sup>491</sup> For Petrarch, in contrast, the name is arbitrary, fragmentary, and eminently detachable from the named object. His insights into the simultaneous weakness and strength of the proper name – its distinctness from its bearer – and the danger of its being fragmented into common nouns, coincide with Derrida’s reflections on names. In Proust, there is a shift from a Dantean to a Petrarchan position regarding the status of the proper name. The narrator’s younger self believes in the essentiality, reality, and uniqueness of the name (as witnessed by his meditations on the name Guermantes), whereas his more mature view evolves to one of suspicion, interchangeability, and detachability (the names of Gilberte and Albertine are confused on a telegram; Mme Verdurin can take the name of the princesse de Guermantes by the final volume).<sup>492</sup>

In sum, the Orpheus myth is appealing to Dante, Petrarch, and Proust as all three authors are able to identify with the archetypal poet-mourner, and share the myth’s central concerns with the relationship between art and grief. Within this mythological model, the conflicting endings and representations such as Eurydice regained versus Eurydice lost allow for the myth to be personalised according to the perspective of the individual artist. For Dante, Beatrice is regained through poetry, but only because this poetry has attained the status of divine revelation. Petrarch and Proust,

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<sup>491</sup> On naming in *Paradiso*, see William Franke, ‘The Place of the Proper Name in the Topographies of the *Paradiso*’, *Speculum*, 87 (2012), 1089–1124.

<sup>492</sup> See Barthes, ‘Proust et les noms’, in *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture suivi de Nouveaux essais critiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 121–34, and Gérard Genette, *Mimologiques: voyage en Cratylie* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), pp. 315–28.

however, are ambivalent about the power of language to bring back their beloved. For Petrarch and Proust, the resurrection of the beloved is only possible through memory, which thereby unavoidably consigns the lady to the past and marks her as lost. For Dante, instead, Beatrice's two moments of resurgence at the end of the *Vita nuova* and in the Garden of Eden at the end of *Purgatorio* are each a fact of the present and an anticipation of certain future reunion in paradisaal eternity. The past, in the *Commedia*, is purged, redeemed, and transcended, whereas it remains the principal source of interest and art for Petrarch and Proust.

### *The Proustian Hell*

Pas qu'aux gardiens pas qu'aux murailles que j'en veux !  
aux Classiques, aux Penseurs d'abord ! magnifique  
poustouflant, l'ont eu : Pétrarque, Dantus ! Homère !  
Prout Prout ! bout bout ! l'iniquité du fond des âges !  
Ils imaginaient des Enfers, nous il est là !<sup>493</sup>

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice raises questions about Proust's eschatological imagination, as he has a choice of setting for this story, whether the Homeric Nekyia, the Virgilian Elysian Fields, Dante's *Inferno*, or Petrarch's internalised Hell. Indeed, as Louis-Ferdinand Céline seems to recognise albeit disdainfully in the quotation above, 'Pétrarque', 'Dantus', and 'Prout' are connected precisely by their reworking of the Classical motif of the Underworld. Victor Graham has noted that 'The classical writer referred to most frequently by Proust is Virgil',<sup>494</sup> and this further supports Proust's

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<sup>493</sup> Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Féerie pour une autre fois I*, in *Romans*, ed. by Henri Godard, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1981-93), IV, pp. 1-176 (p. 81). This passage is cited in David L. Pike, *Passage Through Hell: Modernist Descents, Medieval Underworlds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 36. Although the references to Proust remain slight and infrequent, the whole volume is a useful exploration of the importance of Dante in modernist writings.

<sup>494</sup> Victor Graham, *The Imagery of Proust* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), p. 163.

sharing Petrarch's preference for Virgil's version of the Orpheus myth. Prominent Virgilian references occur in the first volume of the *Recherche*, with the depiction of Odette walking in the Champs-Élysées. Proust reactivates the mythical history of this name, highlighting repeatedly the haunting associations of the Parisian setting with the 'bosquets virgiliens' (*ALR* I:419), and thereby casting an ominous shadow over the representations of passing female beauty. Yet there is in the *Recherche*, as has been noted, a perceptible 'glissement de sens, des Enfers de l'Antiquité à l'enfer des chrétiens',<sup>495</sup> exemplified in the shift from Homeric and Virgilian references to references to Dante's *Inferno*. This shift is then reversed in the final volume where it is the references to Homer's *Odyssey* which outlast all other mythological subtexts.<sup>496</sup>

As regards the presence of Dante in Proust's novel, there is a marked change from Proust's protagonist's childhood love for Gilberte as idealised following the model of Dante's love for Beatrice in the *Vita nuova*, to his adult love for Albertine which is depicted with reference to the suffering of Dante's *Inferno*. As a young man, Proust's protagonist displays a 'fidélité chevaleresque' (*ALR* I:405) to his lady (whether Gilberte, Gilberte's mother Odette, or the duchesse de Guermantes), believing at that early stage that 'l'Amour existait réellement en dehors de nous' (*ALR* I:393). The first sight of Gilberte in the garden (*ALR* I: 139-41) is reminiscent of the first sight of Beatrice aged

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<sup>495</sup> Françoise Létoublon and Luc Fraisse, 'Proust et la descente aux enfers: les souvenirs symboliques de la Nekyia d'Homère dans la *Recherche du temps perdu*', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 97 (1997), 1056-85 (p. 1069). See also Luc Fraisse, 'L'Homère de Marcel Proust ou le mythe du premier écrivain', in *Homère en France après la Querelle (1715-1900): Actes du colloque de Grenoble (23-25 octobre 1995)*, ed. by Françoise Létoublon and Catherine Volpillac-Augier with Daniel Sangsue (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), pp. 455-69. On myths and sources of the Underworld throughout the *Recherche*, see also Evans Lansing Smith, *The Descent to the Underworld in Literature, Painting, and Film, 1895-1950: The Modernist Nekyia* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), pp. 139-219.

<sup>496</sup> Marie Miguet-Ollagnier, *La Mythologie de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982), p. 33. See also her 'Les cités maudites', and *Gisements profonds d'un sol mental: Proust* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2003), pp. 153-5.

nine (VN II), while the second sight of Beatrice in church (VN V, 1) is rewritten in the first sight of the duchesse in Combray church (ALR I:171-6).

Proust's protagonist's loss of belief in the Dantean conception of love as a real, external force coincides with the descent into the infernal landscape of Balbec and the experience of love for Albertine which is acknowledged to be self-centred, subjective, and illusory. The station from which the train for Balbec leaves is staged as one of 'ces lieux merveilleux' and 'tragiques' where 'Il faut laisser toute espérance de rentrer coucher chez soi' (ALR II:6). The echoes of *Infèrno* III.9, 'Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate', are clear.<sup>497</sup> Following Dante-pilgrim's infernal trajectory, Proust's protagonist then encounters Minos-like hotel reception staff (ALR II:24). The parallel breaks down, however, at the third Dantean reference, which destabilises the fixity of the Dantean Afterlife, when Proust's narrator recalls being faced with:

Un salon de lecture pour la description duquel il m'aurait fallu choisir dans le Dante tour à tour les couleurs qu'il prête au Paradis et à l'Enfer, selon que je pensais au bonheur des élus qui avaient le droit d'y lire en toute tranquillité, ou à la terreur que m'eût causée ma grand-mère si dans son insouciance de ce genre d'impressions, elle m'eût ordonné d'y pénétrer. (ALR II:24)

This is a stark reminder that Proust's worldview is much more subjective and unstable than Dante's, and it strikingly interrupts the gradual representation of Balbec as a Dantean Hell ('L'enfer, c'était tout ce Balbec', ALR IV:99). Although Balbec is originally hellish because it takes the protagonist away from his mother, it becomes more and more infernal as the protagonist descends into the torturous world of love and jealousy centred around Albertine. The Hell of Balbec is thus revealed to be more Petrarchan, internalised, and amorously focused than the Dantean *Inferno* (excepting

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<sup>497</sup> See Pierre Albouy, 'Quelques images et structures mythiques dans *La Recherche du temps perdu*', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 5-6 (1971), 972-87 (p. 981), and Peter Collier, *Proust and Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 63 and p. 162 (n. 11).

*Inferno* V, whose fascination for Petrarch was explored in Chapter Two). Dante's Hell is both internal (a state of mind) and external (a fixed, physical place in the geography of the Afterlife). It is at once personal, reflecting the private past story of each individual sinner, and collective, following set Aristotelian and theological categories, as intimated in Chapter One. For Petrarch and Proust, however, infernal experience is limited to a subjective, internalised viewpoint.

The gradually gained understanding of love which Proust's protagonist evinces is, similarly, much closer to Petrarchan love; it is a wholly subjective, self-absorbed, hopeless, and inescapable experience which results in intense suffering. Proust's narrator's frequent comments on the purely subjective nature of love act as apt descriptions of the accretive, imaginary processes of love in Petrarch: 'Bref Albertine n'était, comme une pierre autour de laquelle il a neigé, que le centre générateur d'une immense construction qui passait par le plan de mon cœur' (*ALR* IV:22). Proust's Albertine is, like Petrarch's Laura, an ambivalent, inaccessible, unknowable, and ungraspable creature, and the product of imagining and imaginative remembering. The title of an earlier draft of *Albertine disparue*, *La Fugitive*,<sup>498</sup> highlights the fleetingness of Albertine who is an 'être de fuite' (*ALR* IV:18) and 'Fugitive parce que reine' (*ALR* IV:9), just as Laura was described by Petrarch as 'quel falso dolce fugitivo' (*RVF* 264.28). In contrast to the undeniable immortality of Dante's Beatrice, both Albertine and Laura end up seeming unavoidably mortal and nebulous, particularly in comparison with the glorification of Beatrice. The similarity of the treatment of the myth of Orpheus and

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<sup>498</sup> On the complex publication history of the *Recherche*, and particularly the debate surrounding *Albertine disparue*, see Christine M. Cano, *Proust's Deadline* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), and Nathalie Mauriac Dyer, *Proust inachevé: le dossier 'Albertine disparue'* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005). Inge Crosman Wimmers usefully draws on Proust's *esquisses* and discusses the competing versions of *Albertine disparue* in *Proust and Emotion: The Importance of Affect in 'A la recherche du temps perdu'* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

Eurydice by Proust and Petrarch has already suggested as much, in contrast to Dante's ultimate rejection of this tragic tale of loss. Laura and Albertine are, moreover, presented in Ovidian terms as successively cruel and consoling to the respective lover-protagonist, hence in part their ultimate impenetrability, as they cannot be consistently characterised or their actions predicted. Of Albertine the narrator recalls:

Elle m'offrait justement – et elle seule pouvait me l'offrir – l'unique remède contre le poison qui me brûlait, homogène à lui d'ailleurs ; l'un doux, l'autre cruel, tous deux étaient également dérivés d'Albertine. En ce moment Albertine – mon mal – se relâchant de me causer des souffrances, me laissait – elle, Albertine remède – attendri comme un convalescent. (*ALR* III:503)

Proust's protagonist's fears over Albertine's homosexuality may be a modern twist on the Petrarchan love situation, but the jealousy, suffering, and paradoxes remain strikingly similar in each author. Echoes of Petrarch's 'una man sola mi risana et punge' (*RVF* 164.11) are audible to the reader in the above quotation, but the likely point of intersection for both Petrarch and Proust is the Ovidian intertext of 'Una manus vobis vulnus opemque feret', 'one hand alike will wound and succour'.<sup>499</sup> Again, here is an infernal, endlessly repetitive cycle of healing and wounding, reminiscent of the schismatics in *canto* XXVIII of Dante's *Inferno* (discussed in Chapter One), and which contrasts with the irreversible and unrepeatable healing of *Purgatorio*.

A further important point of consonance between Petrarch and Proust is their common understanding of love as imprisonment. This is highlighted by Proust's choice of title for the fifth volume of the *Recherche*, *La Prisonnière*. Petrarch's lyric subject displays a similar desire to entrap his beloved Laura, wishing – impossibly, as he recognises, to 'chiuder in versi' (*RVF* 29.50) her presence. However, for both Petrarch

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<sup>499</sup> Ovid, *The Art of Love and Other Poems*, trans. by J.H. Mozley, rev. by G.P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), line 44, pp. 180/1. It is certain that the close reading of Ovid, and particularly the *Metamorphoses*, is a point of common ground between Petrarch and Proust that may account for some of the similarities of their images and representations of love.

and Proust this imprisoning venture ends up rebounding on the lover; while the beloved ultimately escapes the lover's keen grasp, the lover himself is left enslaved and entrapped. Writing, for Proust and Petrarch, encloses an absence (a remembered, now lost presence) rather than a present, actual presence. Proust's narrator ends up lamenting his 'esclavage' (*ALR* III:682) and describing his former self as the real prisoner of the story: 'Quand j'étais rentré, ç'avait été avec le sentiment d'être un prisonnier, nullement de retrouver une prisonnière' (*ALR* III:850). Petrarch, similarly, has his lyric subject declare 'I' son pregon' (*RVF* 121.7) and repeatedly complain about the chains and snares of love which imprison him. For Petrarch and Proust, Hell is an interior experience in this life. Each seems too concerned with present infernal personal suffering to be concerned with any infernal Afterlife such as that found in Dante. While Dante's *Inferno* encompasses both earthly (past) and eschatological (present/future) realities and temporalities ('figura' and 'fulfillment', in Erich Auerbach's terms),<sup>500</sup> the Hells depicted and experienced by Petrarch and Proust respectively dwell on and in the former.

### *Naming mourning: Lamentations*

Grief, like death, is banal and unique.<sup>501</sup>

The book of Lamentations, in the Old Testament, is a further interesting point of common ground between Dante, Petrarch, and Proust. This book is a crucial text for the Middle Ages because of its position in the Passion liturgy. Readings from

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<sup>500</sup> See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 174–202, and *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (New York: New York Review Books, 2007). From this perspective, Petrarch and Proust may thus mark the natural endpoint of the overshadowing of the religious 'fulfillment' by the secular 'figura' which Auerbach discerns as already in motion in the *Commedia*.

<sup>501</sup> Barnes, *Levels of Life*, p. 70.

Lamentations feature prominently in the Triduum Sacrum, or three days of mourning and preparation (Thursday to Saturday) preceding Easter Sunday, thus encouraging an identification of the text with mourning (belatedly, historically speaking, and in anticipation, liturgically speaking) for Christ's death on the Cross. Yet the text also passed from being understood in a Christological sense to being a linguistic repertory from which writers could draw inspiration for their own mournful texts in a secular context. As Ronald Martinez in particular has shown, Lamentations informs the language of mourning in Dante's *Vita nuova* and *Purgatorio*, and in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*;<sup>502</sup> in this manner a text liturgically interpreted as referring to Christ is also used to describe the loss of the beloved female.

The main verse from Lamentations which recurs is 'O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus' ('*O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow*', Lamentations 1:12). It is highly ironic that this line, which argues for the uniqueness of the grief experienced, should be the one that has been the most copied and reused by writers such as Dante and Petrarch. It also has interesting implications and resonances, if not in terms of outright imitation, for Proust.

In the *Vita nuova*, the announcement of Beatrice's death is introduced very abruptly and starkly with the opening words of the book of Lamentations, 'Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua domina gentium' ('*How doth the*

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<sup>502</sup> Ronald L. Martinez, 'Mourning Beatrice: The Rhetoric of Threnody in the *Vita nuova*', *Modern Language Notes*, 113 (1998), 1-29; 'Lament and Lamentations in *Purgatorio* and the Case of Dante's Statius', *Dante Studies*, 115 (1997), 45-88; 'Dante Between Hope and Despair: The Tradition of Lamentations in the *Divine Comedy*', *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 5 (2002), 45-76; 'Mourning Laura in the *Canzoniere*: Lessons from Lamentations', *Modern Language Notes*, 118 (2003), 1-45; 'Dante's Jeremiads: The Fall of Jerusalem and the Burden of the New Pharisees, the Capetians, and Florence', in *Dante for the New Millennium*, pp. 301-19.

*city sit solitary that was full of people! how is the mistress of the Gentiles become as a widow!?*). This Latin quotation is shocking in the sudden manner in which it erupts into the Italian ‘libello’, interrupting the canzone ‘Sì lungiamente’, which remains cut off and unfinished.<sup>503</sup> Moreover, the line remains isolated by Dante’s refusal to describe Beatrice’s death, which, as Jerome Mazzaro remarks, ‘comes as a shock to most naturalistically minded readers’.<sup>504</sup> Dante gives as one reason for this silence ‘non sarebbe sufficiente la mia lingua a trattare come si converrebbe di ciò’ (VN XXVIII, 2); here the concern with what type of language is appropriate to describe death and mourning is foremost. Teodolinda Barolini comments that ‘the omission is salutary and necessary precisely *because* so much more is at stake than the death of a courtly beloved’, and that ‘the secrecy in this case safeguards the special nature of Beatrice, and protects her departure [...] from being sentimentalized, vulgarized, cheapened – from being rendered one more pathetic event in the long record of human pathos.’<sup>505</sup> In other words, the only way to make Beatrice’s death different is, ultimately, to be silent about it, for to have recourse to language would immediately lead to generalisation and aestheticisation of the event.

The quotation from Lamentations is used to set an elevated, serious, tragic tone and to involve the reader in the protagonist’s grief by an appeal to a common mournful text. The collective import of this text is later in the *Vita nuova* reasserted in the sonnet ‘Deh peregrini’ (VN XL, 9–10), which reechoes Lamentations 1:1 and 1:12 (‘voi passate

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<sup>503</sup> See Charles Singleton, ‘The Use of Latin in the *Vita Nuova*’, *Modern Language Notes*, 61 (1946), 108–12, and Zygmunt G. Barański, ‘The Roots of Dante’s Plurilingualism: “Hybridity” and Language in the *Vita nova*’, in *Dante’s Plurilingualism*, pp. 98–121 (pp. 112–13).

<sup>504</sup> Jerome Mazzaro, *The Figure of Dante: An Essay on the ‘Vita nuova’* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 15.

<sup>505</sup> Teodolinda Barolini, “Cominciando dal principio infino a la fine” (V.N., XXIII, 15): Forging Anti-Narrative in the “Vita Nuova”, in *La gloriosa donna de la mente*, pp. 119–40 (p. 131).

| per lo suo mezzo la città dolente', vv. 6-7), and closes with the assertion that 'le parole ch'om di lei pò dire | hanno virtù di far piangere altrui' (vv. 13-14). Strangely, however, it is in a double sonnet on the departure of the first screen lady that Dante for the first time in the 'libello' explicitly draws on Lamentations 1:12 (VN VII, 3-6): 'O voi che per la via d'Amor passate, | attendete e guardate | s'elli è dolor alcun, quanto 'l mio, grave' (vv. 1-3).<sup>506</sup> The reader is bound to wonder how appropriate such use of Lamentations is when later in the text it will become associated so inextricably with Beatrice's death, although it is perhaps intended that retrospectively this sonnet can be interpreted as an anticipated sign of that same death. Dante stages the iterability of this line from Lamentations within his own text, highlighting the lack of uniqueness of reference which the words ultimately have, since they can be applied to Christ's death, the death of Beatrice, and the departure of a screen lady almost interchangeably, it seems. The linguistic identification of Beatrice with Christ is unsurprising, even expected, in the context of the *Vita nuova*, which seeks precisely through its prose commentary to promote a Christological reading of Beatrice.<sup>507</sup> Yet the choice to include a poem written for another lady, and which is only now, in the 'libello', reinterpreted as an insincere expression of simulated grief at the departure of the first screen lady, remains awkward.<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> In the *Vita nuova*, the device of the screen lady (the 'donna schermo de la veritate', VN V, 3) is a means of writing poems to or about Beatrice whilst pretending that their addressee is explicitly another. The protagonist chooses the first screen lady himself as she is sitting in between himself and Beatrice, the true object of his gaze and affections (VN V); the second is designated by the god of Love (VN IX). While it is thereby admitted that Dante did write poems to ladies other than Beatrice, this device is his way in the 'libello' of exculpating himself from any charges of infidelity. See, for instance, P.J. Klemp, 'The Women in the Middle: Layers of Love in Dante's *Vita nuova*', *Italica*, 61:3 (Autumn 1984), 185-94.

<sup>507</sup> See, for instance, Gragnolati, 'Authorship and Performance in Dante's *Vita nova*', in *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, pp. 125-41 (especially, pp. 139-40).

<sup>508</sup> On this poem prior to its insertion into the *Vita nuova*, see Dante, *Rime giovanili e della 'Vita nuova'*, pp. 102-9. It is noted in particular (p. 106) that the repetition of the line from Lamentations reveals the 'tenacità

A tension thus emerges between private and public in the *Vita nuova*, with Dante's use of public language (both in the sense that it is taken from the Bible and the liturgy, and in that it is addressed to an audience) a striking counterbalance to his expressed desire to treat Beatrice as unique and respect the personal nature of his experience. The close of the text makes this latter desire explicit. Dante proposes to 'non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei', and adds 'io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna' (VN XLII, 1-2).<sup>509</sup> The two desires are inextricable: writing about Beatrice as she deserves means precisely saying about her what has never been said of anyone. Against the necessity of the as yet unreached uniqueness of the language appropriate to Beatrice, the communality and repetitiveness of the use of Lamentations is striking. The *Vita nuova* is very much a text written with a specific audience in mind, which ranges from Dante's 'primo amico' Cavalcanti, the 'fedeli d'Amore', the 'donne gentili' (in both 'Donne ch'avete' and 'Li occhi dolenti'), and Beatrice's brother in mourning, to the pilgrims journeying via Florence to Rome. In order to captivate this readership, Dante has recourse to recognisable, public, religious language – the Lamentations – which acts as a shared point of comparison for his personal experience and thereby renders this experience understandable and powerful for his audience.

At the end of the *Vita nuova*, Dante appears to reject such a compromise, resolving not to use imitative or collective language to talk about Beatrice. Yet by the time he comes to write the *Commedia*, Dante has stepped back from such an impasse

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della memoria dantesca' as well as his skill and interest in integrating biblical allusions and quotations into his poetry prior to both the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia*.

<sup>509</sup> On these lines, see Roberto Leporatti, "'Io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna'" (V.N., XLII, 2): La "Vita nuova" come *retractatio* della poesia giovanile di Dante in funzione della "Commedia", in *La gloriosa donna de la mente*, pp. 249-91. I discuss the *Vita nuova*'s closure (or lack thereof) more fully in the Epilogue.

and returned to the fine line that is trodden in the ‘libello’ between the personal and the public. If the *Commedia* is, in Barolini’s words, ‘the epic of the “I”’,<sup>510</sup> the *Vita nuova* is already, in some senses, the lyric of an exemplary, Everyman figure. At the start of the *Convivio*, Dante offers one justification for speaking about oneself as the useful exemplarity of such discourse, following the model of Augustine’s *Confessions*. Dante states that ‘ragionare di sé’ is permissible if, in so doing, ‘grandissima utilidade ne segue altrui per via di dottrina’.<sup>511</sup> This quest for the exemplarity of one’s personal situation is present not only in the *Commedia*, but also in the *Vita nuova*. As Picone has explored, the ‘I’ of the *Vita nuova* is already ‘esemplare e personale, agiografica e autobiografica’.<sup>512</sup> The interplay between personal and collective in the opening lines of the *Commedia* (‘Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita | mi ritrovai per una selva oscura’, *Inf.*1.1–2, my emphases) marks not a moving away from but rather a rendering explicit of the desired harmony between private and public on which much of the *Vita nuova* was predicated. The desire to speak of Beatrice in a wholly new manner is not satisfied in the *Commedia*, however novel the transformation, in *Paradiso*, of the beloved into an eloquent, learned, authoritative figure may be.<sup>513</sup> Rather, the *Vita nuova*’s recognition of the failure to describe Beatrice adequately or appropriately is restated in *Paradiso*, but with new consequences:

Se quanto infino a qui di lei si dice  
fosse conchiuso tutto in una loda,

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<sup>510</sup> Teodolinda Barolini, ‘2. Dante and the lyric past’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 14–33 (p. 32); *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, pp. 24–45 (p. 45).

<sup>511</sup> *Convivio*, II, p. 11 (I, ii, 14).

<sup>512</sup> Michelangelo Picone, ‘La *Vita Nuova* fra autobiografia e tipologia’, in *Dante e le forme dell’allegoresi*, ed. by Michelangelo Picone (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1987), pp. 59–69 (p. 59). See also Picone, ‘Rito e *narratio* nella *Vita Nuova*’, in *Dal medioevo al Petrarca: Miscellanea di studi in onore di Vittore Branca* (Florence: Olschki, 1983), pp. 141–57.

<sup>513</sup> On ‘Beatrice loquax’, see Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, pp. 360–78.

poca sarebbe a fornir questa vice.

La bellezza ch'io vidi sì trasmoda  
non pur di là da noi, ma certo io credo  
che solo il suo fattor tutta la goda.

Da questo passo vinto mi concedo  
più che già mai da punto di suo tema  
soprato fosse comico o tragedo:

ché, come sole in viso che più trema,  
così lo rimembrar del dolce riso  
la mente mia da me medesmo scema.

Dal primo giorno ch'i' vidi il suo viso  
in questa vita, infino a questa vista,  
non m'è il seguire al mio cantar preciso;  
ma or convien che mio seguir desista  
più dietro a sua bellezza, poetando,  
come a l'ultimo suo ciascuno artista. (*Par.XXX.16-33*)

This recognition of failure is not one of disappointment or a resolution to strive to do better in the future, as it was at the end of the *Vita nuova*; rather, Dante-poet has by now learnt to accept the limits of human language. The reader is reminded explicitly of the *Vita nuova* here ('Dal primo giorno ch'i' vidi il suo viso' harks back to the first sight of Beatrice narrated in *VN* II), but the reminder serves to highlight the distance between the *Vita nuova*'s ultimately doomed quest for originality and the present serene acceptance of the constraints of a descriptive language that is, if neither unique or accurate, at least intelligible for its audience. The poet finally accepts that he will never 'degnamente trattare di [Beatrice]', but this no longer matters much since the impetus of writing has shifted from a desire for uniqueness (the benefits of which the experience of Hell in large measure debunks) to a desire for universality (as staged in the ideal communality of Purgatory).

As elucidated in Chapter One, *Purgatorio* endorses a collective, liturgical, musical use of language which asserts that it is the communality of language that gives literature its performative power. Through shared language, the reader is exhorted to

fulfill the *Commedia*'s claim that public poetry is a means to personal salvation. Originality and uniqueness of language are, in the deceased souls at least, the mark of sinful self-isolation and damnation; as *Purgatorio* illustrates, language must be collective and shared in order to recreate social, religious and political harmony. What Nancy Vickers has described as Dante's creation of 'a community of mourning' in the *Vita nuova* is also a central part of the structure of *Purgatorio*, where the work of mourning is even more specifically a social, group activity.<sup>514</sup> In both the *Vita nuova* and *Purgatorio* Dante thus participates in what Darian Leader has called 'the principle of borrowed mourning' or 'a dialogue of mournings',<sup>515</sup> that is, the process of using established language with cultural weight (such as the book of Lamentations) 'as a set of instruments to help us to mourn'.<sup>516</sup> While for Girard mimetic desire or 'désir emprunté'<sup>517</sup> is condemned as inauthentic, what we might call by analogy and recalling Leader a form of 'deuil emprunté' appears instead to be cathartic and ennobling.

Notwithstanding such observations, it should be remembered that *Paradiso* complicates this stark distinction between infernal individuality and purgatorial collectivity. Through reunion with Beatrice at the end of *Purgatorio*, Dante redeems and reaffirms rather than rejects his personal past. The way is thereby paved for the paradoxical resolution embraced in *Paradiso* where the individual and the collective are in harmony, and where personal desire for one's friends and family ('per le mamme, | per li padri e per li altri che fuor cari', *Par.*XIV.64-5) is fully integrated with the universal

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<sup>514</sup> Nancy J. Vickers, 'Widowed Words: Dante, Petrarch, and the Metaphors of Mourning', in *Discourses of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. by Kevin Brownlee and Walter Stephens (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1989), pp. 97-108 (p. 107).

<sup>515</sup> Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 78 (emphases in the original).

<sup>516</sup> Leader, *The New Black*, p. 87.

<sup>517</sup> Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, p. 47.

desire for God.<sup>518</sup> Moreover, it is also at the end of *Purgatorio* and in *Paradiso* that Dante's unique, starkly individual poetic voice is authorised, first by Beatrice and later by Cacciaguida. The latter's prophecy "“a te fia bello | averti fatta parte per te stesso”" (*Par.*XVII.68-9) insists on Dante-pilgrim's autonomy through the repeated use of the second person singular object pronoun, most explicitly in the tripartite sequence of 'te', 'averti', and 'te stesso', but also implicitly within the word 'parte', which is itself echoed in 'per te'. While this is ostensibly a prediction of Dante-pilgrim's independence and self-distancing in exile from any political party, it is also relevant for his poetic independence, particularly since Cacciaguida goes on to proclaim "“tutta tua vision fa manifesta”", thereby endorsing "“la voce tua”" and "“Questo tuo grido”" (*Par.*XVII.128, 130, and 133), where a similarly emphatic use of the possessive pronoun is audible. Dante's poetic vocation entails the vaunting of a lone voice that, however, escapes infernal condemnation because of its social mission (he is, after all, instructed by Beatrice to speak "“in pro del mondo che mal vive”", *Purg.*XXXII.103), thereby reconciling or at least transcending the seemingly irreducible conflict between damnable individuality, on the one hand, and purgatorial collectivity, on the other.

For Petrarch, no such reconciliation is possible, as there remains a stark division in the *Canzoniere* between a sort of social morality and complete self-absorption in one's own poetry. The proeminal sonnet seeks to establish this poetic story as a cautionary tale for an audience both intended ('Voi ch'ascoltate', *RVF* 1.1, the explicit addressees) and unintentional (the 'popol tutto', *RVF* 1.9, who have witnessed the lyric subject's humiliating and all too public amorous vicissitudes). The rest of the collection, however, more often tends to stage a solipsistic speaking voice who seems to wish to be

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<sup>518</sup> See Gagnolati, 'Nostalgia in Heaven'.

audible only to himself (as exemplified by the recurrent trope of the dialogue with the fragmented self, the interminable ‘parlar meco’ of ‘i pensier’ mei’, *RVF* 73.93). As explored in Chapter Two, Petrarch, by identifying with the infernal situation, remains torn between admiration of the poetic power of monomania and a tormented awareness of its flaws.

In the *Canzoniere*, the experience of love and mourning is mediated not only by Lamentations, and by Dante, but by Dante’s use of Lamentations, by Lamentations seen through the eyes of Dante.<sup>519</sup> The opening apostrophe of the *Canzoniere*, ‘Voi ch’ascoltate’, has even been read as an abbreviation of Lamentations 1:12.<sup>520</sup> Closer textual echoes occur later in the collection, for instance in lines from sonnet 88, ‘Voi che siete in via, | volgete i passi’ (*RVF* 88.9–10). What is crucial in these two examples is that Petrarch is seeking a sympathetic audience for his suffering, and that in order to inspire the desired sympathy, he resorts not only to exhortative language (‘voi’), but also to a language steeped in liturgical significance, and more specifically language that recalls the liturgy of Christ’s Passion. This is particularly appropriate as Petrarch claims his protagonist first sees Laura on Good Friday, as sonnet 3 indicates. The ‘commune dolor’ of ‘i miei guai | nel commune dolor s’incominciaro’ (*RVF* 3.7–8) is the universal mourning at Christ’s death which Lamentations was understood to anticipate and enact. In this manner, the reader is drawn into emotional and collective identification with Petrarch’s story: ‘At the very beginning in Petrarch, it is the shared emotional pain at Christ’s death that creates the sense of a collectivity that understands what pain and

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<sup>519</sup> See Ronald L. Martinez, ‘Places and Times of the Liturgy from Dante to Petrarch’, in *Petrarch and Dante*, pp. 320–70, especially p. 348 for the observation that ‘Dante has furnished [Petrarch] with the vernacularized liturgical language he cannot do without’.

<sup>520</sup> See Gianfranco Contini, *Letteratura italiana delle origini* (Florence: Sansoni, 1970), p. 580.

suffering are.<sup>521</sup> Indeed, the communality and collectivity of the ‘commune dolor’ is further emphasised by its intertextual history, recalling as it does the *incipit* of a *planctus* by Guittone d’Arezzo on the death of Jacopo da Leona, ‘Comune perta fa comun dolore, | e comuno dolore comun pianto’.<sup>522</sup> Petrarch’s language of mourning is thus at least doubly layered, both in relation to the Easter liturgy, and to earlier lyrical, mournful poetry. Petrarch’s linguistic choices thus inscribe the poet into a history of speaking subjects whose own emotions and poetry continue to haunt the words that he chooses.

Yet this invocation of the collective, in the form of liturgical Christological resonances, in the end does the Christian poet a disservice, since it highlights the rift between the necessary devotion to Christ (the communal Easter worship of the Cross commemorated in the final line of *RVF* 62, ‘ramenta lor [i pensier] come oggi fusti in croce’, v. 14) and the personal story in which no true collective participation is possible or desirable (the poet’s private love for Laura). The use of shared, liturgical language such as Lamentations is, then, ultimately inappropriate for the singularly solitary love of the poet-lover for his lady. Petrarch is keen, following in the footsteps of the author of Lamentations and of the Dante of the *Vita nuova*, to assert the uniqueness of his suffering, asking for instance ‘Qual ingegno a parole | poria aguagliare il mio doglioso stato?’ (*RVF* 268.18-19). Petrarch is concerned that his poetry, and in particular the important *canzone RVF* 268, be *satis triste*, ‘sufficiently sad’, as I noted in Chapter Two. Dante reintegrates this desire for uniqueness within the collective story of the salvation of Every(woman), and vaunts the salvific power of Beatrice over all who see her, and not just himself alone (as evidenced, for instance, already in the sonnet ‘Tanto gentile e

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<sup>521</sup> Wiley Feinstein, *The Civilisation of the Holocaust in Italy: Poets, Artists, Saints, Anti-Semites* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), p. 70.

<sup>522</sup> See Gianfranco Contini, *Poeti del duecento*, 2 vols (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1960), I, p. 232.

tanto onesta', VN XXVI). Such a solution is foreclosed to Petrarch, who cannot relinquish the uniqueness of his experience and his love of solitude rather than communality. With the 'waning of the Middle Ages'<sup>523</sup> comes perhaps a loss of harmony between the individual and the collective. Unlike Dante, for Petrarch talking about oneself is no longer justified by useful similarity to other people, but rather aims to highlight difference, uniqueness, and isolation.

The theme of Lamentations 1:12, that of the uniqueness of one's grief, reappears in Proust's protagonist's belated reaction to his grandmother's death, at which point the narrator recalls 'je ne tenais pas seulement à souffrir, mais à respecter l'originalité de ma souffrance' (*ALR* III:156). This is a concern that Proust shares not only with the Dante of the *Vita nuova*, but also, subsequently, with Roland Barthes. When Barthes is confronted with the death of his own mother, it is natural for him as a passionate reader of the *Recherche* to want to use his reading of Proust as a mediating linguistic model for this experience. Yet he is also concerned about the ethics of such literary mediation. Ironically, in posing such questions, Barthes is even more derivative – and self-consciously so – of Proust, whose novel raises precisely the same concerns surrounding mourning and literary writing.

Commenting on Proust's statement regarding the need to respect the 'originalité de [la] souffrance', Barthes adds: 'ce que j'ai perdu, ce n'est pas une Figure (la Mère), mais un être ; et pas un être, mais une *qualité* (une âme) : non pas l'indispensable, mais l'irremplaçable.'<sup>524</sup> In other words, for Barthes as for Proust it is necessary to respect the uniqueness of the loss, and there is a worry that language is too general and abstract. In

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<sup>523</sup> The phrase is Johan Huizinga's, from *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, trans. by Frederik Hopman (London: E. Arnold, 1924).

<sup>524</sup> Barthes, *La Chambre claire: note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 118.

his daily notes following his mother's death and published only posthumously, Barthes writes: 'Je ne veux pas en parler par peur de faire de la littérature – ou sans être sûr que c'en ne sera pas – bien qu'en fait la littérature s'origine dans ces vérités.'<sup>525</sup> Barthes maintains an ambivalent attitude towards the transformation of mourning into literature, although he recognises – and argues elsewhere – that all writing, and specifically Dante's *Commedia* and Proust's *Recherche*, stems from a confrontation with the reality and inevitability of death.<sup>526</sup>

In 'Circonfession', Derrida expresses similar worries to Barthes, describing himself as:

Moi qui, entre autres remords à l'endroit de ma mère, me sens bien coupable de publier sa fin, d'en exhiber les derniers souffles et pis encore, à des fins que d'aucuns pourraient juger littéraires, au risque d'ajouter un exercice douteux à la série « l'écrivain et sa mère », sous-série « la mort de la mère ».<sup>527</sup>

Not only does Derrida highlight that all language is a betrayal of uniqueness ('dès qu'on parle, dès qu'on entre dans le milieu du langage, on perd la singularité'),<sup>528</sup> but he laments, more specifically for our purposes, that 'le discours de deuil est plus qu'un autre, lui qui devrait l'être moins, menacé par la généralité du genre'.<sup>529</sup> Yet Derrida moves towards a more grateful and pragmatic approach to the language of mourning, an approach which represents a form of uneasy reconciliation between the demands of readability (the general) and personal experience. Appropriately, it is in a text written on

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<sup>525</sup> Barthes, *Journal de deuil*, p. 33.

<sup>526</sup> Barthes, '« Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure »': 'le "milieu de la vie" n'est peut-être jamais rien d'autre que ce moment où l'on découvre que la mort est réelle, et non plus seulement redoutable' (p. 342). Adam Watt explores the 'persistent presence' of Proust at both an explicit and a subterranean level in the *Journal de deuil*, and situates 'Barthes's two greatest loves', his mother and Proust, within other texts by Barthes. See Watt, 'Reading Proust in Barthes's *Journal de deuil*', *Nottingham French Studies*, 53:1 (forthcoming Spring 2014).

<sup>527</sup> 'Circonfession', p. 38.

<sup>528</sup> Derrida, *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), p. 87.

<sup>529</sup> *Chaque fois unique*, p. 124.

the occasion of Barthes's death that Derrida elaborates most clearly his position as regards the role of language in grief:

Deux infidélités, un choix impossible : d'un côté ne rien dire qui revienne à soi seul, à sa propre voix, se taire ou au moins se faire accompagner ou précéder, en contrepoint, par la voix de l'ami. [...] Mais ce trop de fidélité finissait par ne rien dire, et ne rien échanger. Il retourne à la mort. Il y renvoie, il renvoie la mort à la mort. A l'opposé, en évitant toute citation, toute identification, tout rapprochement même, afin que ce qui s'adresse à Roland Barthes ou parle de lui vienne vraiment de l'autre, de l'ami vivant, on risque de le faire disparaître encore, comme si on pouvait ajouter de la mort à la mort et indécement la pluraliser encore. Reste à faire et à ne pas faire les deux à la fois, corriger une fidélité par l'autre.<sup>530</sup>

Such worries about creating or using an ethical language of mourning echo Derrida's concerns over both the fidelity of mourning more generally and the status of the 'nom propre' which is at once 'impropre'.

In the above passage, Derrida rejects both one's own personal voice and the act of quotation (repeating the words of the lost friend) as unfaithful. Language and silence – self-effacement through quotation of another – are considered to be equally a betrayal of one's duty to the deceased. In the light of the importance of exchange, a wholly personal language appears too inward-looking and self-absorbed, rather than desirable. Dante, Petrarch, Proust, and Barthes in different ways acknowledge the impossibility of creating a wholly unique language of mourning, while continuing to yearn for such an idiom. Derrida's warning that were such a language possible, it would be equally unfaithful as it would be unreadable even and especially for the dead other provides a way to valorise the necessary compromise between the specific and the general that the literature of mourning effectuates. It is clear that for Derrida a compromise between

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<sup>530</sup> *Chaque fois unique*, pp. 71-2.

shared, generic language and one's own voice is not only inevitable, but also necessary, even if the right balance is difficult, impossible, even, to achieve. Colin Davis explains:

Speaking only in one's own words kills off the dead for a second time; speaking in their words terminates dialogue, and kills them just as surely. [...] There is no happy balance between the two forms of betrayal [Derrida] describes, just the hope that a vigilant oscillation may avoid the pitfalls of either extreme.<sup>531</sup>

This 'vigilant oscillation' importantly mirrors the rhythm of Derridean 'demi-deuil'. Likewise, Christina Howells comments that Derrida's reflections on specific deaths which he mourns display an exemplary blend of the personal and the impersonal in an unstable mix: 'In each of his various texts on mourning Derrida employs an intense and even uncanny form of intertextuality, where direct citation is interwoven within his own, intimate, elegiac writing.'<sup>532</sup> Derrida promotes a paradoxically 'shared singularity' and 'interweaves the "private" and "public" in destabilising and challenging ways'.<sup>533</sup> The notable repetition of the line from Lamentations stressing uniqueness is particularly able to illustrate this paradox, although Derrida's answer to '*Che cos'è la poesia?*' is highly pertinent. In his words, poetry is 'un secret partagé, à la fois public et privé, *absolument* l'un et l'autre, absous de dehors et de dedans, ni l'un ni l'autre'.<sup>534</sup> Ultimately, for Derrida, 'on n'écrit jamais ni dans sa propre langue ni dans une langue étrangère',<sup>535</sup> but rather always in a strange, unsettling, and unstable mixture of the personal (the proper, the unique) and the communal (the shared, the public, so that even one own's mother tongue is in this sense foreign). In this way Derrida can be seen to deconstruct the basis of Girard's distinction between authentic and inauthentic desire,

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<sup>531</sup> Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 139.

<sup>532</sup> Christina Howells, *Mortal Subjects: Passions of the Soul in Late Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 192.

<sup>533</sup> Timothy Clark, *The Poetics of Singularity: The Counter-Cultural Turn in Heidegger, Derrida, Blanchot, and the later Gadamer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 150 and 152.

<sup>534</sup> '*Che cos'è la poesia?*', in *Points de suspension*, pp. 303–8 (p. 304).

<sup>535</sup> 'Survivre', in *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), p. 147.

between ‘désir *selon Soi*’ and ‘un désir *selon l’Autre*’,<sup>536</sup> by positing the ethical necessity of a constant intermingling of the two.

Proust wants to preserve the uniqueness (‘originalité’) of one’s experience of loss, and is worried about the contaminating, inappropriate banality of speech to register such loss, lamenting that ‘on cherche à diminuer les proportions de sa douleur en la faisant entrer dans le langage parlé entre la commande d’un costume et des ordres pour le dîner’ (*ALR* IV:45). In *Le Temps retrouvé*, generality, however, seems more tolerable in written language, if equally inevitable: ‘à extraire la généralité de notre chagrin, à en écrire, nous sommes un peu consolés’ (*ALR* IV:480). Here, writing is explicitly connected with the move from the specific to the general, even if the qualification ‘un peu’ undercuts the potential triumphalism of the assertion. The narrator goes on to recognise that ‘un langage universel [...] du moins sera permanent’ and accessible to ‘toutes les âmes’ (*ALR* IV:482). Yet Lamentations has quite a different role in the *Recherche* than in the *Commedia* or the *Canzoniere*. Significantly, the description of the lack of sincere grief on the part of the leading lights of society such as the duchesse de Guermantes and, in her own sphere, Mme Verdurin, is couched in terms precisely of a refusal to follow the model of Lamentations. M. Verdurin silences Brichot’s continued gossiping about the recently deceased Dechambre with sarcastic criticism of such ‘jérémiades’ (*ALR* III:293), while the duc de Guermantes, in a similar vein, chastises his wife ‘« Voyons, Oriane, ne restez pas à bavarder comme cela et à échanger vos jérémiades avec Swann, vous savez bien pourtant que Mme de Sainte-Euverte tient à ce qu’on se mette à table à huit heures tapant »’ (*ALR* II:883). In each case resorting to the language of Lamentations (originally attributed to the prophet Jeremiah, hence the

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<sup>536</sup> See, for instance, Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, p. 17 (emphases in the original).

common noun jeremiad) might have been more appropriate than the callous and dismissive attitude to the death of a close friend. Yet, on the other hand, Françoise's very public, even melodramatic mourning for Saint-Loup does place the book of Lamentations as an old-fashioned rather than an actual model for Proust: 'Elle prit immédiatement son rôle de pleureuse et commenta la mémoire du mort de lamentations, de thrènes désespérés' (*ALR* IV:427).<sup>537</sup>

It is possible that Proust's avoidance of direct quotation from the book of Lamentations is symptomatic of his quest for linguistic newness and avoidance of direct imitation, although it may also be indicative of the gradual displacement of the Bible from its prominent cultural position in the Middle Ages, even if biblical language often resonates in the *Recherche*.<sup>538</sup> It should, in any case, be remembered that Petrarch and Dante are part of a culture that values imitation,<sup>539</sup> whereas Proust inherits the Romantic privileging of originality and coincides with the modernist call for a *tabula rasa*, as witnessed by his many assertions that the artist is alone and cannot be guided (e.g. *ALR* III:711). If Lamentations is an obvious source of mournful tropes for medieval authors, its importance is, for modern writers, far from self-evident or singular.

Two final examples of external mimetic mourning which are specific to the *Recherche* deserve mention, the abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (rendered more current to Proust by Massenet's opera première in 1884), and Racine's *Phèdre*.<sup>540</sup> The former

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<sup>537</sup> Readers may remember that the protagonist's mourning is deliberately contrasted to Françoise's as early as volume one of the *Recherche*, after the death of Léonie (*ALR* I:151-2).

<sup>538</sup> See Stéphane Chaudier, *Proust et le langage religieux: la cathédrale profane* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004).

<sup>539</sup> See Martin L. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) and Thomas M. Greene, *The Light of Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

<sup>540</sup> Wimmers highlights these passages as examples of the importance of complex affective identification on the part of the reader with characters in works of art. See *Proust and Emotion*, pp. 159-60 (on *Manon*) and pp. 46-8, 90-3, and 164 (on *Phèdre*).

example comes before Albertine's death but after her departure and highlights the dangers of external mimetic mourning:

J'entendis à l'étage au-dessus du nôtre des airs de *Manon* joués par une voisine. J'appliquais leurs paroles, que je connaissais, à Albertine et à moi, et je fus rempli d'un sentiment si profond que je me mis à pleurer. C'était :

*Hélas, l'oiseau qui fuit ce qu'il croit l'esclavage,*

*Le plus souvent, la nuit d'un vol désespéré revient battre au vitrage*

et la mort de Manon :

« *Manon réponds-moi donc ! – Seul amour de mon âme,*

*Je n'ai su qu'aujourd'hui la bonté de ton cœur. »*

Puisque Manon revenait à Des Grieux, il me semblait que j'étais pour Albertine le seul amour de sa vie. Hélas, il est probable, que si elle avait entendu en ce moment le même air, ce n'eût pas été moi qu'elle eût chéri sous le nom de Des Grieux [...]. (*ALR* IV:35)

The protagonist is honest to himself about the dangers of external artistic mediation, which is too general in its applicability to have any final meaning. The transferability that allows the protagonist to identify with Des Grieux (and anticipate a happy ending for himself) is the same that allows Albertine to feel affection for people other than the protagonist and ensures an unhappy ending to the protagonist's story. The narrator's more general comments following on from this moment of temporary identification and then rejection of the artistic model are perceptive:

Je savais qu'on ne peut lire un roman sans donner à l'héroïne les traits de celle qu'on aime. Mais la fin du livre a beau être heureuse, notre amour n'a pas fait un pas de plus et, quand nous l'avons fermé, celle que nous aimons et qui est enfin venue à nous dans le roman, ne nous aime pas davantage dans la vie. (*ALR* IV:36)

Proust is all too aware of the potentially illusory nature of external mediation.

Yet the second example from *Albertine disparue*, Racine's *Phèdre*, is much more pertinent and much less easily dismissed. The narrator recognises that Racine's tragedy stages 'l'énoncé des lois que je devais expérimenter dans ma vie' (*ALR* IV:41) and acts as a 'sorte de prophétie des épisodes amoureux de ma propre existence' (*ALR* IV:43). Proust's protagonist identifies himself with the eponymous tragic heroine, and Albertine

with Hippolyte. Albertine's death as a result of a horse-riding accident can perhaps be read as an allusion to the mode of Hippolyte's death, torn to pieces by his horses who have been frightened by a sea-monster sent by Neptune even though his very name means 'horse-tamer', thereby heightening the relevance of the identification of the two characters.<sup>541</sup>

Nonetheless, as I have already noted, *Albertine disparue* is, compared to the other volumes of the *Recherche*, lacking in artistic references, particularly musical or literary ones. It seems that Proust's narrator is attempting to move beyond the reliance on literary and mythological models (in particular, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice) which characterised the protagonist's mourning for his grandmother. *Albertine disparue* does retain an Orphic echo in the following passage which describes the role of Albertine's name in Proust's protagonist's mourning:

Si j'avais pensé tout haut, je l'aurais répété sans cesse et mon verbiage eût été aussi monotone, aussi limité que si j'eusse été changé en oiseau, en un oiseau pareil à celui de la fable dont le cri redisait sans fin le nom de celle qu'homme, il avait aimée. (*ALR* IV:16)

The linguistic characterisation here of mourning as 'monotone', 'limité', and endlessly repetitive ('dont le cri redisait sans fin le nom') agrees with and supports Kristeva's definition of melancholic language and is typical of the first chapter of *Albertine disparue* as a whole.<sup>542</sup> Yet the identity of the fable is unclear, resembling as it does the myths of Echo endlessly repeating the name of her beloved Narcissus (a myth that is central to Petrarch's poetics), as well as the story of the death of Orpheus repeating in vain the

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<sup>541</sup> Marie Miguet-Ollagnier, 'Le Cheval: du réel à l'imaginaire dans l'œuvre de Proust', *Bulletin d'informations proustiennes*, 25 (1994), 115-28 (pp. 126-7), and *Gisements profonds d'un sol mental*, pp. 131-42. On Proust and Racine, see Louise M. Jefferson, 'Proust and Racine', *Yale French Studies*, 34 (1965), 99-105; François Kessedjian, 'Proust et Racine', *Europe*, 502-3 (February-March 1971), 28-44; Antoine Compagnon, 'Proust sur Racine', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 196 (1984), 39-64; Richard Goodkin, *Around Proust*, pp. 38-62.

<sup>542</sup> Consider, for example, the repetition of the phrase 'Albertine est partie' throughout the opening pages of the volume (e.g. *ALR* IV:14).

name of Eurydice.<sup>543</sup> In this last respect it is notable that in Virgil's narration of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice in the *Georgics*, Orpheus is compared to a mother nightingale lamenting the theft of her young from the nest,<sup>544</sup> although Proust's 'oiseau' is, in contrast, a male victim of metamorphosis, and remains difficult to identify. Proust seems to be deliberately evading recognisable mythological models here, at the same time as he hints at a source text ('la fable'). Through the rewriting and erasure of earlier models a new model of mourning is established that is more personal than the overtly literary language of mourning for the grandmother.

Ingrid Wassenaar has noted that *Albertine disparue* is the most critically neglected part of the *Recherche*,<sup>545</sup> while Margaret Gray complains of the lack of empathy the narrative arouses at this point:

In thinking back on the story [of Albertine], we somehow feel curiously detached from the account of the narrator's suffering. Is it that we are as lacking in affect and response as Marcel himself – or that something in the way the Albertine anguish is depicted has anesthetized any spontaneous, instinctive sympathy on the reader's part?<sup>546</sup>

Such opinions are representative of the difficulties which *Albertine disparue*, particularly its opening chapter, has tended to cause for readers and critics alike.<sup>547</sup> One possible reason, and answer to Gray's question, is that the reader finds it hard to empathise with a

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<sup>543</sup> Marie Miguet-Ollagnier suggests that Proust is misremembering the myth of Tereus transformed into a hoopoe, although this seems less likely. See *La Mythologie de Marcel Proust*, p. 273, n. 23: 'Il est probable qu'ici Proust, se fiant à sa seule mémoire, dit une erreur. Le personnage auquel il pense est sans doute Térée changé en huppe (ou en vautour)'.

<sup>544</sup> See *Georgics*, book IV, vv. 507–15 (p. 254).

<sup>545</sup> Ingrid Wassenaar, *Proustian Passions: The Uses of Self-Justification for 'A la recherche du temps perdu'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 176. See also Watt, *Reading in Proust's 'A la recherche'*, p. 110, and Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, pp. 46–7.

<sup>546</sup> Margaret Gray, *Postmodern Proust* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 55.

<sup>547</sup> Jean-François Revel is unusual in describing himself as bored by passages on involuntary memory such as the *madeleine* episode and in his eulogy on the penultimate volume: 'Je ne connais pas de plus belle méditation sur l'absence, sur la mort et sur l'oubli que *La Fugitive* ; de plus transparente, patiente, souple, sincère et précautionneuse constatation d'effets réels'. See his *Sur Proust: remarques sur 'A la recherche du temps perdu'* (Paris: Denoël, 1970), pp. 32 and 58. Watt, too, praises *Albertine disparue* for its examination of 'love, loss and mourning [...] with a blend of sensitivity and obsessive curiosity that produces pages of emotional intensity and profound beauty unmatched elsewhere in modern literature'. *Marcel Proust* (London: Reaktion, 2013).

story that is expressed in such acerbically original, repetitive, and monomaniacal language. In stark contrast, the narration of the protagonist's grief at his grandmother's death, both in anticipation and belatedly, has consistently moved readers and led to such sections being amongst the most discussed and admired passages, outside of the *madeleine* episode perhaps, of the novel. Beckett is not alone in the opinion that the 'intermittences du cœur' is 'perhaps the greatest passage that Proust ever wrote'.<sup>548</sup> Proust's experiment with a narration of mourning that does not call on tradition or recognised literary models does not seem wholly successful; his anticipated grief for his grandmother, which relies explicitly on the myth of Orpheus, is found by most readers to be much more accessible, memorable, and moving. Moreover, the theories of *Le Temps retrouvé*, as I have already noted, reintegrate the general as a condition of readability and wider relevance, and so can be considered a move away from the absolute, monotonous singularity of 'Le chagrin et l'oubli'.

To conclude, the quest for the specificity and uniqueness of the language of mourning that unites Dante, Petrarch, and Proust is epitomised in the Orphic focus on the proper name, which is the only form of language that is considered to be unique to the lost beloved. A Derridean reading of this phenomenon, however, highlights the pitfalls of such confidence in the name, which, while it is the only word that can have such an all-encompassing referential function even and especially in the absence of the object, is nonetheless simultaneously a mark of mortality. Petrarch and Proust seem more aware of such a danger than Dante, whose faith in the proper name is confirmed in the reunion scene in the Garden of Eden. While Dante goes beyond mourning and melancholia and knows that he will be reunited with his immortal beloved in eternity,

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<sup>548</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, p. 39.

Petrarch and Proust remain melancholic in their lack of hope and their presentation of the beloved as fugitive, unknowable, and mortal. Nonetheless, for all three authors, external mimetic mourning is both a useful source of exemplars of the linguistic expression of mourning and a threat to the desired fidelity to the uniqueness of the lost object. In this concern for originality, Dante and Petrarch are surprisingly modieval, caught between a medieval culture of imitation and a modern desire for innovation.

In my next and final chapter, by way of conclusion to the thesis as a whole, I shift the focus to the *Vita nuova*, in order to see how this text can illustrate and challenge the characteristics of the language, structure, and end of mourning that I have deduced from consideration of Dante's *Commedia*, Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, and Proust's *Recherche* thus far.

# AIEEEEEEEJD

## **Epilogue.** **Dante's *Vita nuova* and the Search for the End**

Scripsi multa et scribo.

*I have written much and am still writing.*<sup>549</sup>

This epigraph is, it will be remembered, from Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortune*, and is Joy's (Gaudium's) response to Reason's (Ratio's) assertion of the 'melancholie species infinitas', the '*innumerable types of melancholy*', cited at the start of this thesis. One of the symptoms of melancholy which Reason outlines is a kind of writing which is itself an expression of melancholy at the same time as it seeks to find a way out of this same melancholy. Gaudium's reply is particularly relevant in its implicit admission of the vital connection between endless melancholia and interminable writing. This statement corresponds with what we know about Petrarch's own dedication to writing, revision, and rewriting right up to the point of death, and suggests that his endless literary project is a result or a symptom of his particular experience of inescapable, unending melancholia. The co-dependent endlessness of writing and melancholia has important implications for questions of literary closure and this chapter, appropriately, considers what end there can be to writing inspired by melancholia.

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<sup>549</sup> *Les remèdes aux deux fortunes/De remediis utriusque fortune*, I, p. 228; *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, I, p. 145.

In this final chapter, I explore how this relationship between melancholia and literary form is worked out in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust. In so doing, in terms of the theoretical framework therein involved, I return to Bersani in order to address issues of teleology and examine the role that writing is presented by each author as fulfilling. My primary focus is a text that has been largely overlooked thus far in this thesis, despite its making an appearance in Chapter Two: the *Vita nuova*. It is my wish to use Dante's 'libello' to draw out some final thoughts concerning discourses of mourning in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust and to test and challenge conclusions that have been coming to the fore throughout my research. The *Vita nuova* is a further and, for the present, final prism through which I map out the relationship between Dante's *Commedia*, Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, and Proust's *Recherche*.

In this decision I am motivated by a sentiment akin to that expressed by Robert Pogue Harrison at the start of *The Body of Beatrice*: "The *Vita nuova* is a deeply enigmatic work. It will, one hopes, appear even more so by the end of this investigation, especially to those who are familiar with it."<sup>550</sup> The *Vita nuova* may be, chronologically, the first of my sources, as well as the shortest by a long way, but it remains one of the most difficult and intriguing texts, a text that continues to demand constant rereading and reflection and is more than equal to having the task of serving as a point of culmination placed upon its slender shoulders.

I begin by tracing a brief history of the idea of sublimation in various manifestations of twentieth-century psychoanalytical thought. Having thereby established the theoretical terms within which my concluding thoughts are situated, I proceed to map out the *Vita nuova* in relation to Freudian mourning and melancholia,

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<sup>550</sup> Harrison, *The Body of Beatrice*, p. 1.

paying particular attention to ways in which this narrative can therefore be seen to differ from the later version of events depicted in the *Commedia*, as explored in Chapter One. I focus especially on the future-orientated ending of the *Vita nuova*, which contrasts with the circularity of the *Commedia*'s overall structure, and contend that the thematic differences which I have found in Dantean, Petrarchan, and Proustian attitudes towards experiences of grief are reflected in formal and structural differences. To support this argument, I analyse the endings achieved in Proust's *Le Temps retrouvé* and Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. In order to understand the conclusion of the *Vita nuova*, I introduce as a point of comparison the episode of the 'intermittences du cœur' from Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, which leads to an evaluation of the relation between *temps perdu*, the image of the book, and involuntary memory in all three authors.

### *A very short introduction to sublimation*

The word sublimation comes from the Latin verb *sublimare*, to raise or elevate. It is used in scientific contexts to describe the transformation of a solid into a gas, or vice versa, and therefore more widely to mean 'Something which has been transformed into a higher, nobler, or more refined state'.<sup>551</sup> For Freud, this transformation is that of sexual instincts into a 'nobler' (because more socially acceptable) form such as art. This meaning of sublimation seems to overlap with that of another term that is equally important and equally difficult to define: catharsis. Catharsis is variously understood as the purging or cleansing of emotions through art, having therefore a similarly social function, and is traceable back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, although it remains difficult to

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<sup>551</sup> *OED*, 'sublimation', definition 4.a.

define or pin down exactly.<sup>552</sup> Indeed, the use of the word sublimation in psychoanalysis is similarly largely undefined and also involves a taming or redirecting of emotions. In the words of Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, 'L'absence d'une théorie cohérente de la sublimation reste une des lacunes de la pensée psychanalytique.' They do, nonetheless, hazard the following definition:

Processus postulé par Freud pour rendre compte d'activités humaines apparemment sans rapport avec la sexualité, mais qui trouveraient leur ressort dans la force de la pulsion sexuelle. Freud a décrit comme activités de sublimation principalement l'activité artistique et l'investigation intellectuelle. La pulsion est dite sublimée dans la mesure où elle est dérivée vers un nouveau but non sexuel et où elle vise des objets socialement valorisés.<sup>553</sup>

Subsequently, in his further study of the concept, Laplanche reiterates, while compiling a list of references within Freud's oeuvre to what he calls this 'croix' (both cross and crux) of both Freud and psychoanalysis, that 'la sublimation sera plus citée que développée et analysée'.<sup>554</sup>

Freud is, nonetheless, at his most explicit about sublimation in his study of Leonardo da Vinci, commenting near the start that:

Observation of men's daily lives shows us that most people succeed in directing very considerable portions of their sexual instinctual force to their professional activity. The sexual instinct is particularly well fitted to make contributions of this kind since it is endowed with a capacity for sublimation: that is, it has the power to replace its immediate aim by other aims which may be valued more highly and which are not sexual. (*SE* XI:77-8)

Here, Freud glosses sublimation as a *replacement* of sexual instincts; elsewhere in this same text he also uses terms such as conversion, transformation, and substitution (e.g. *SE* XI:75 and 80). In *The Ego and the Id*, besides, sublimation is, similarly, 'a

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<sup>552</sup> See Adnan K. Abdulla, *Catharsis in Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

<sup>553</sup> 'Sublimation', *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, p. 467 and 465.

<sup>554</sup> Jean Laplanche, *Problématiques III: la sublimation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), p. 17. See also, on the ambiguities of Freudian sublimation, André Green, *Le Travail du négatif* (Paris: Minuit, 1993), pp. 289-345.

desexualisation' (*SE* XIX:30 and 46). However vague, such definitions contain enough ammunition in them for Bersani to indict Freudian sublimation.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Bersani has attempted to move beyond Freud, since he considers Freud's model of sublimation unrealistic and too negative. For Bersani, the enigmatic transmutation of desire into art is a bourgeois, cultural act of repression or even suppression of emotion. In *The Freudian Body*, Bersani therefore elaborates his own theory of sublimation which entails not a rejection but rather a continuation of desire, in a way which challenges rather than conforms to social hegemony. He proposes 'a view of sublimation as coextensive with sexuality, as an appropriation and elaboration of sexual impulses rather than as a special form of renunciation of such impulses'.<sup>555</sup> If Freudian sublimation might be considered, in relation to a dialectic of grief and writing, as a sort of transmutation of tears into art, Bersanian sublimation entails, instead, a repetition and extension of one's tears. The second form is analogous to the audibly Orphic situation described in a poem by Yves Bonnefoy, which asserts: 'C'est pleurer deux fois ce que tu pleures / Si tu oses chanter par grand refus',<sup>556</sup> while the first – Freud's version – is, in these terms, a definitive shift from 'pleurer' to 'chanter'.

Such an anti-Freudian (in this one respect at least) stance is mirrored in the works of theorists other than Bersani, and it is interesting that even a Freudian such as Laplanche envisages a model of sublimation as a reversible movement, that is, 'non pas seulement comme ici [le passage] du sexuel au non-sexuel, mais également du non-sexuel au sexuel',<sup>557</sup> an observation which subverts Freud's understanding of sublimation

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<sup>555</sup> Bersani, *The Freudian Body*, p. 45.

<sup>556</sup> Yves Bonnefoy, 'Justice', in *Poèmes: Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve; Hier régnant désert; Pierre écrite; Dans le leurre du seuil* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1978), p. 80 (vv. 9-10).

<sup>557</sup> Laplanche, *Problématiques III: la sublimation*, p. 19.

as a social desexualising. Kristeva, too, seems to consider sublimation to be an attempt at a destabilisation rather than a (destructive) overcoming of the traumatic experience:

La sublimation fait une tentative dans ce sens : par mélodies, rythmes, polyvalences sémantiques, la forme dite poétique qui décompose et refait les signes est le seul « contenant » qui paraisse assurer une emprise incertaine mais adéquate sur la Chose. (SN, p. 24)

Derrida, moreover, in his defense of the ethical necessity of what he calls ‘demi-deuil’, praises ‘la sublimité d’un deuil sans sublimation et sans le triomphe maniaque dont parle Freud’,<sup>558</sup> and in fact, I would argue that there are notable similarities between Bersanian sublimation and Derridean ‘demi-deuil’. Both, for instance, manifestly promote an unstable perpetuation of desire in polemic against a Freudian model of putting an end to desire in both life (through the work of mourning) and art (through sublimation). In this chapter, in due course, I explore how these different types and models of sublimation have an impact on choices regarding literary form and can be used to illuminate and explain structural concerns.<sup>559</sup> First, however, it is necessary to consider the intricacies of the *Vita nuova* before proceeding to a comparison of closure and sublimation in Dante, Petrarch, and Proust.

### *Epiphanies in Dante and Proust*

Consideration of the *Vita nuova* in the light of Freud’s ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ results in many of the same conclusions which I reached regarding the *Commedia* read against this same psychoanalytical text. In sum, in Chapter One, on Dante’s *Commedia*, I found that although *Inferno* does illustrate aspects of melancholia (endlessness, obsession with the past, lack of hope, linguistic impediments), analysing the process of

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<sup>558</sup> Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*, p. 57.

<sup>559</sup> This approach is inspired in part, as already noted in Chapter Two, by Gragnolati’s *Amor che move: Linguaggio del corpo e forma del desiderio in Dante, Pasolini e Morante*.

mourning at work in *Purgatorio* necessitated several crucial amendments to the Freudian model. Freud's work of mourning is a process of gradual detachment from a past love object in order to make space for a replacement love object and the forming of new, libidinal attachments. Detachment from the past in Dante's *Purgatorio*, however, serves to centre the mind on God, who is a final and irreplaceable love object on a wholly different level to all previous ephemeral human attachments.

A Freudian reading of the *Vita nuova* complements and complicates this analysis of the *Commedia*. After Beatrice's death, Dante's interest in the 'donna gentile' would seem to suggest that the work of mourning is proceeding as normal. Over time, his attachment to the deceased Beatrice lessens, and this is made clear by his ability to form a new attachment, that with the 'donna gentile'. A struggle ensues between Dante's conscience, which demands fidelity to his first love, and his more fickle heart, which is tempted by the presence of the new lady to forget the old love. Such a transferral of affection from the deceased Beatrice to the living 'donna gentile' appears to signal what for Freud is the desirable end of the work of mourning. This pattern is, however, complicated by the reappearance of Beatrice at the end of the 'libello', which reignites the protagonist's love for Beatrice and condemns his affection for the 'donna gentile' as reprehensible. Might this condemnation be understood as a refusal of the work of mourning and a return to melancholia? Or does the *Vita nuova*, like the *Commedia*, represent a way out of Freud's dichotomy? I will seek an answer to such questions through comparison of the reappearance of Beatrice with the reappearance of the grandmother in Proust's novel.

It is first important to note that strictly speaking the *Vita nuova* ends in fact with not one but two visions of Beatrice in close succession. The first is narrated in the prose

of chapter XXXIX, with accompanying sonnet ‘Lasso! per forza di molti sospiri’; the second brings the ‘libello’ to a close by rendering any further writing at that point in time impossible because unworthy of its subject matter, Beatrice. If any poem might be said to come close to recording this second vision, it is the sonnet ‘Oltre la spera’, yet this sonnet precedes the vision in the text and seems indeed to be not a record of but the catalyst for the vision, which Dante introduces as taking place ‘Appresso questo sonetto’ (XLII, 1). The two episodes together form a chiasmic structure, with the first moving from revelation and remembrance (‘ricordandomi di lei secondo l’ordine del tempo passato’, XXXIX, 2) to writing (‘propuosi di fare uno sonetto [...]. E dissi allora’, XXXIX, 6), and the second from writing (‘dissi allora uno sonetto’, XLI, 1) to a further vision (XLII).<sup>560</sup> This matches a shift which Marziano Guglielminetti has discerned in the *Vita nuova* from memory as a catalyst for poetry to writing as itself productive or even self-generative.<sup>561</sup> The terms used to describe the two experiences differ somewhat, since the first is ‘una forte imaginazione in me’ (XXXIX, 1) and the second ‘una mirabile visione’ (XLII, 1), but both do share a common language of appearing (‘mi parve vedere’, in the first, and ‘apparve a me’ in the second). Helpful in this regard is Foster’s assertion that while *Vita nuova* XXXIX records an ‘apparition’, ‘Oltre la spera’ is more properly a ‘heavenly vision’, the difference being that the first involves ‘a “downward” movement of [the lady] from heaven’ and the second ‘an “upward” movement of [the poet’s] own spirit to the sight of her in heaven’.<sup>562</sup> These distinctions will be borne in mind as the two passages are considered.

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<sup>560</sup> In this analysis of course I am passing over VN XL and the sonnet ‘Deh peregrini’.

<sup>561</sup> Marziano Guglielminetti, *Memoria e scrittura: L’autobiografia da Dante a Cellini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), pp. 42–72.

<sup>562</sup> Foster, *Petrarch*, p. 83. Foster draws this distinction with reference to Petrarch’s ‘Volo con l’ali’ (RVF 362). For some clarity on Dante’s use of such terms in the *Vita nuova*, see: Ignazio Baldelli, ‘Visione, immaginazione

The first instance of Beatrice's resurgence in the *Vita nuova* after her death marks the protagonist's return to constancy, after having been tempted to forsake the memory of Beatrice for the present attractions of the 'donna gentile':

Contra questo avversario de la ragione si levoe un die, quasi ne l'ora de la nona, una forte imaginazione in me, che mi parve vedere questa gloriosa Beatrice con quelle vestimenta sanguigne co le quali apparve prima a li occhi miei; e pareami giovane in simile etade in quale io prima la vidi. Allora cominciai a pensare di lei; e ricordandomi di lei secondo l'ordine del tempo passato, lo mio cuore cominciò dolorosamente a pentere de lo desiderio a cui sì vilmente s'avea lasciato possedere alquanti die contra la costanza de la ragione: e discacciato questo cotale malvagio desiderio, sì si rivolsero tutti li miei pensamenti a la loro gentilissima Beatrice. E dico che d'allora innanzi cominciai a pensare di lei sì con tutto lo vergognoso cuore, che li sospiri manifestavano ciò molte volte; però che tutti quasi diceano nel loro uscire quello che nel cuore si ragionava, cioè lo nome di quella gentilissima, e come si partio da noi. E molte volte avvenia che tanto dolore avea in sé alcuno pensiero, ch'io dimenticava lui e là dov'io era. Per questo raccendimento de' sospiri si raccese lo sollenato lagrimare in guisa che li miei occhi pareano due cose che disiderassero pur di piangere. (VN XXXIX, 1-4)

The episode continues, closing with the aforementioned sonnet 'Lasso! per forza di molti sospiri', which describes the protagonist's weeping, but omits any mention of the root cause (Beatrice's reappearance), and therefore proves quite an anti-climactic end to this event.<sup>563</sup>

This passage has several features which we might, retrospectively, identify as Proustian: the obsession with the first sight of the beloved, which recurs in Proust's

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e fantasia nella *Vita nuova*', in *I sogni nel Medioevo: Seminario internazionale, Roma 2-4 ottobre 1983*, ed. by Tullio Gregory (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985), pp. 1-10; Françoise Glénisson-Delannée, 'Apparitions, "imaginazioni" et visions dans la *Vita nuova*', *Chroniques italiennes*, 45 (1996), 5-27; and Ernesto Livorni, 'Dream and Vision in Dante's *Vita Nova*', in '*Accessus ad Auctores*: Studies in Honor of Christopher Kleinhenz', ed. by Fabian Alfie and Andrea Dini (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2011), pp. 93-114. Baldelli, for instance, argues that Dante uses 'visione' for experiences while asleep (that is, for dreams), and 'imaginazione' or 'fantasia' for waking visions (or *daydreams*) and therefore considers the final 'mirabile visione' a '*visio in somniis*' (p. 7).

<sup>563</sup> As Barolini and Gragnolati comment in their edition of the *Rime*, there is no shame in this sonnet (unlike in the preceding prose, where 'vergogna' is the key emotion); it is, instead, 'un semplice sonetto di pianto e di dolore' lacking the drama of temptation added in the *Vita nuova* (*Rime giovanili e della 'Vita nuova'*, p. 500).

novel in relation to both Gilberte and Albertine;<sup>564</sup> the striking red dress which reminds anyone familiar with Proust of the duchesse de Guermantes's outfit in *Le Côté de Guermantes* (*ALR* II:883-4), although the connotations of the two colours perhaps differ;<sup>565</sup> and, finally, the power of memory to reinforce affections. It is this last point which I wish to develop further, by way of a contrastive reading of this episode from Dante with the 'intermittences du cœur' from the *Recherche*, that is, the narration of sudden eruption of the protagonist's mourning for his deceased grandmother:

Bouleversement de toute ma personne. Dès la première nuit, comme je souffrais d'une crise de fatigue cardiaque, tâchant de dompter ma souffrance, je me baissai avec lenteur et prudence pour me déchausser. Mais à peine eus-je touché le premier bouton de ma bottine, ma poitrine s'enfla, remplie d'une présence inconnue, divine, des sanglots me secouèrent, des larmes ruisselèrent à mes yeux. L'être qui venait à mon secours, qui me sauvait de la sécheresse de l'âme, c'était celui qui, plusieurs années auparavant, dans un moment de détresse et de solitude identiques, dans un moment où je n'avais plus rien de moi, était entré, et qui m'avait rendu à moi-même, car il était moi et plus que moi (le contenant qui est plus que le contenu et me l'apportait). Je venais d'apercevoir, dans ma mémoire, penché sur ma fatigue, le visage tendre, préoccupé et déçu de ma grand-mère, telle qu'elle avait été ce premier soir d'arrivée ; le visage de ma grand-mère, non pas de celle que je m'étais étonné et reproché de si peu regretter et qui n'avait d'elle que le nom, mais de ma grand-mère véritable dont, pour la première fois depuis les Champs-Élysées où elle avait eu son attaque, je retrouvais dans un souvenir involontaire et complet la réalité vivante. Cette réalité n'existe pas pour nous tant qu'elle n'a pas été recrée par notre pensée (sans cela les hommes qui ont été mêlés à un combat gigantesque seraient tous de grands poètes épiques) ; et ainsi, dans un désir fou de me précipiter dans ses bras, ce n'était qu'à l'instant – plus d'une année après son enterrement, à cause de cet anachronisme qui empêche si souvent le calendrier des faits de coïncider avec

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<sup>564</sup> The first sight of Gilberte (*ALR* I:139), where this is compared precisely to 'une vision', is returned to in the final volume (*ALR* IV:269), while similarly the first sight of Albertine is imagined to be the closest to the truth: 'l'Albertine réelle que je découvrais, après avoir connu tant d'apparences diverses d'Albertine, différait fort peu de la fille orgiaque surgie et devinée, le premier jour, sur la digue de Balbec' (*ALR* IV:188). See, on love at first sight, Jean Rousset, *Leurs yeux se rencontrèrent: la scène de première vue dans le roman* (Paris: José Corti, 1981), especially pp. 137-41 (on the *Vita nuova*) and pp. 122-6, pp. 133-6, and pp. 183-7 (on episodes from Proust).

<sup>565</sup> As Joan Rosasco writes of the duchesse, 'la toilette rouge proclame au monde la cruauté inhumaine de cette femme dont les souliers rouges sont comme trempés dans le sang'. See 'Le Texte et sa doublure', in *Proust et le texte producteur*, ed. by John D. Erikson and Irène Pagès (Guelph, ON: University of Guelph, 1980), pp. 93-113 (p. 99). The red of Beatrice's dress is, in contrast, usually interpreted as the colour of charity, although Dino S. Cervigni's reading is more bloody: 'Re-configuring the Self through Suffering, Violence, and Death in Dante's *Vita Nuova* and *Comedy*', in 'Accessus ad Auctores', pp. 115-35.

celui des sentiments – que je venais d'apprendre qu'elle était morte. (*ALR* III:152-3)

This is a key incident in the *Recherche* as a whole, and it is illustrative of this passage's centrality that its title, 'Les Intermittences du cœur' (*ALR* III:148), was at one time considered by Proust as the title for the whole work.<sup>566</sup> For Beckett at least, this is 'perhaps the greatest passage that Proust ever wrote'.<sup>567</sup> This episode is literally an enactment of 'demi-deuil' in its traditional meaning of the partial relaxation in social rules and conventions which comes into effect after the first year of mourning ('grand deuil') has elapsed.<sup>568</sup> It can also, in the specific sense which I outlined in the preceding chapter, be read as staging an experience of Derridean 'demi-deuil' in its unstable, interminable, self-proclaimed intermittence (its oscillating rhythm and blurring of boundaries) between memory and forgetfulness, presence and absence, and past and present.

The similarities between this passage and that from the *Vita nuova* already cited are striking and provide much textual support for George Steiner's rhetorical question, 'Could there be any more acute understanding than Dante's or Proust's – so akin in this respect – of the manifold ways in which the worlds of the dead reach into those of the living?'.<sup>569</sup> In each case, a deceased female reappears suddenly and unexpectedly, and in so doing rescues the male protagonist from his state approaching indifference and

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<sup>566</sup> *Corr.* XI, p. 257, letter to Eugène Fasquelle [28 octobre 1912]. See also Wimmers, *Proust and Emotion*, p. 59.

<sup>567</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, p. 39. See also, following on from Beckett's admiration for Proust's mournful writing, Sjeff Houppermans, 'Continuité du deuil: de Proust à Beckett', in *L'Affect dans l'œuvre beckettienne*, ed. by Matthijs Engelberts and Sjeff Houppermans (= *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, 10 (2000)), pp. 73-84.

<sup>568</sup> In his explanation of Derridean 'demi-deuil', Geoffrey Bennington reminds us that the period from the death of a loved one to the first anniversary of their death was traditionally classified as a 'grand deuil', while after more than a year 'demi-deuil' sets in. See *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 19. In 'Circonfession', Derrida himself speaks of the botanical and entomological definitions of 'deuil' and 'demi-deuil' (p. 156).

<sup>569</sup> George Steiner, *Antigones*, p. 232.

forgetfulness, plunging him instead into renewed weeping and guilt at his preceding infidelity and lack of remembrance. To return to Foster's terminology, both cases involve 'a "downward" movement' of the beloved to the protagonist. In each passage the 'apparition' of the lady unleashes an uncontrollable flood of memories and repentant tears in the protagonist.

These similarities can be supported by the comparison, common in Proustian criticism, of involuntary memory with both Christian grace and even with Beatrice specifically. The former view is expressed most succinctly by Georges Poulet, who writes that 'Dans la pensée proustienne la mémoire joue donc le même rôle surnaturel que la grâce dans la pensée chrétienne',<sup>570</sup> and is repeated by other critics who, similarly, confirm that involuntary memory is to be read as 'une transposition littéraire de la grâce chrétienne'.<sup>571</sup> The latter view, that involuntary memory is somehow beatific or even Beatrice-like, is affirmed by both Georges Cattaui and Jacqueline Risset. In the words of Cattaui:

Le héros de Proust, comme celui de Dante, c'est l'*homme*, l'homme au milieu du chemin de sa vie, l'homme aux portes des enfers et du paradis, l'homme avec ses vices, ses servitudes et sa grandeur ; l'homme accédant enfin (sous la conduite d'une Béatrice qui n'est autre que la *mémoire affective*) au séjour de la Béatitude.<sup>572</sup>

Risset, likewise, comments in relation to the opening of the *Recherche*, 'Comment ne pas penser, durant ce « secours d'en haut » [ALR 1:5], à Béatrice descendue du Paradis pour prier Virgile de tirer Dante de la « forêt obscure » [Inf.I.1, 'selva oscura'] où il s'était perdu'.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> Georges Poulet, *Études sur le temps humain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1949), p. 372.

<sup>571</sup> Lempart, *La Transposition esthétique des valeurs chrétiennes dans l'œuvre de Marcel Proust*, p. 53.

<sup>572</sup> Georges Cattaui, *Proust perdu et retrouvé* (Paris: Plon, 1963), p. 15.

<sup>573</sup> Risset, *Traduction et mémoire poétique*, p. 108.

Such analogies are relevant for the involuntary memory of the grandmother in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, particularly since the language of divine aid reappears here in the phrase ‘L’être qui venait à mon secours’. Like Beatrice, the grandmother is ‘une présence inconnue, divine’. These two events are both presented as epiphanies, according to the *OED* definition of an epiphany as ‘A manifestation or appearance of some divine or superhuman being’.<sup>574</sup> Even more relevant for Proust and Dante is Wallace Fowlie’s definition of the literary epiphany as ‘a flash, an eruption, a tearing of the usual complex of perceptions’.<sup>575</sup> Nonetheless, there are important differences between the two passages. In each case, an external event is the trigger for an internal reaction involving heart, mind, and memory, but the original catalyst differs as in Dante it is the sight of Beatrice, whereas in Proust it is the unbuttoning of his boots that then provokes the sight of his grandmother. In Proust, then, there is a mediation of external reality and a concrete situation (a place invested with personal significance) which is lacking from the *Vita nuova*. This somehow makes the apparition more personal and more contingent, unlike the therefore more supernatural and inexplicable vision in the ‘libello’. In Proust, the ‘secours d’en haut’ is, then, in truth more of a ‘secours d’en bas’, that is, help from

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<sup>574</sup> On the use of the term epiphany in literary criticism and Proust studies, see Erika Fülöp, *Proust, the One, and the Many: Identity and Difference in ‘A la recherche du temps perdu’* (London: Legenda, 2012), pp. 12–52 (especially pp. 15–20). While Fülöp, in line with other critics, does not consider the ‘intermittences du cœur’ as an epiphany (p. 46, n. 19), she does note that for Jean-Marc Quaranta this episode is epiphanic. See his ‘Impressions obscures et souvenirs involontaires: morphologie des épiphanies proustiennes’, *Bulletin d’Informations Proustiennes*, 28 (1997), 99–115. An equivalent term to epiphany might be Alain Badiou’s ‘Event’, which Bill Burgwinkle proposes as relevant to *Inferno* I and defines as ‘moments in life when subjectivity is overturned [literally, a *bouleversement*]: moments that lead to a loss of orientation and identification and institute a new affiliation to the particular moment or event that provoked this momentous change’, ‘Modern Lovers: Evanescence and the Act in Dante, Arnaut, and Sordello’, in *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages*, pp. 14–28 (p. 16).

<sup>575</sup> Fowlie, ‘Epiphanies in Proust and Dante’, p. 1. Fowlie compares *Un amour de Swann* with *Inferno* V, and *Le Temps retrouvé* with *Inferno* XXVI, but from my perspective places too much emphasis on the similarities rather than the differences between Proustian and Dantean epiphanies. Robin Kirkpatrick warns critics to ‘be cautious in our employment of the epiphany trope’, although he does seem to suggest that the term is appropriate for the *Vita nuova*. See his ‘Polemics of Praise’, p. 20.

within, from the depths of memory, as Jack Jordan notes.<sup>576</sup> Forgotten memories are placed for Proust, like the Freudian unconscious, in the depths of one's being, and require an involuntary experience of unearthing akin to archeological excavation in order to bring them to light.<sup>577</sup> For Dante, however, the key to one's identity lies beyond and above oneself, not within.

In Dante, the original apparition is external and therefore objective and transcendent, whereas the apparition in Proust is subjective, immanent, and internal: 'Je venais d'apercevoir, dans ma mémoire'. At the end of the *Vita nuova* the reinvigoration of memory is an important aspect of Beatrice's reinstatement in Dante's heart, but memory is only an agent or accompaniment and not the prime mover or catalyst. From this perspective, only the apparition in the *Vita nuova* can truly be considered the work of an external power such as the grace of God. There is a sense – beyond the different catalysts, internal versus external – in which the Dantean epiphany is not so different from Proustian involuntary memory, as both involve a breaking down of the boundaries between self and other, life and death, and past and present, and involve intense, unexpected emotional upheaval. As Lina Bolzoni has explored, Dantean memory is 'carica di passioni, tale da toccare, ferire nel profondo', and functions 'al confine fra corpo e psiche, fra conoscenza razionale e forte coinvolgimento emotivo'.<sup>578</sup> Yet the involuntary in Dante in this instance (the reappearance of Beatrice) is more a sign of the mystery and unpredictability of grace than a Proustian comment on the erratic workings of memory.

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<sup>576</sup> Jack Louis Jordan, *Marcel Proust's 'A la recherche du temps perdu': A Search for Certainty* (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1993), p. 53.

<sup>577</sup> Malcolm Bowie has explored the Freudian imagery of depth, profundity, and archeology in *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, pp. 18–27.

<sup>578</sup> Lina Bolzoni, 'Dante o della memoria appassionata', pp. 186 and 171.

Indeed, further irreconcilable differences become evident in the eventual consequence of this apparition. It becomes apparent, for instance, that in Proust, the resurrection of the beloved (his grandmother) is temporary and painful, whereas in Dante it is a glimpse of the permanent, joyous reality of which he will be assured in eternity. The grandmother will sink back into relative *oubli* until another involuntary memory reawakens the protagonist's love for her and grief at her irrevocable absence, whereas after such a vision of Beatrice forgetting is impossible for Dante. Ultimately, then, the vision is a reassurance for Dante of Beatrice's immortality, but for Proust's protagonist a reminder of mortality. While the reappearance is for Dante a rediscovery of Beatrice, Proust's protagonist instead experiences this involuntary memory as an Orphic losing of his grandmother a second time:

Je savais que je pouvais attendre des heures après des heures, qu'elle ne serait plus jamais auprès de moi, je ne faisais que de le découvrir parce que je venais, en la sentant pour la première fois, vivante, véritable, gonflant mon cœur à le briser, en la retrouvant enfin, d'apprendre que je l'avais perdue pour toujours. (*ALR* III:155)

While Beatrice is regained ('retrouv[ée] enfin', in Proustian terms), the grandmother is 'perdue pour toujours'. The Dantean epiphany therefore, after a further vision, marks an end to writing, for the time being, whereas the Proustian epiphany is situated in the middle of the *Recherche* and does not offer either a way into writing (for the protagonist) or a way out (for the narrator). The Proustian 'intermittences' instead remain witnesses of a melancholic subject in whom the teleological work of mourning is repeatedly interrupted and frustrated by involuntary memory; in this, the grief for the grandmother's death can be said to follow the same pattern of 'demi-deuil' which I have outlined in relation to the grief at Albertine's death.

Although this refusal at the end of the *Vita nuova* of the new love (the ‘*donna gentile*’) may seem like a symptom of Freudian melancholia, the experience is presented by Dante as actually one of triumph and victory. Beatrice’s reinstatement at the end of the *Vita nuova* is already inconceivable and inexplicable within the theoretical framework of Freud’s ‘Mourning and Melancholia’. Dante seems to suggest that a refusal of the work of mourning can be far from melancholic, where such a refusal is part of a Christian worldview that rewards fidelity with reunion beyond the grave. Beatrice’s reappearance in the *Vita nuova* is a foretaste of such a future certainty, and in this respect many features of the transcendence of mourning and melancholia in the *Commedia* (delineated in Chapter One) can be discerned in the *Vita nuova*. Yet *Purgatorio*, as Chapter One demonstrates, also challenges the conclusion of the *Vita nuova*. The path from loss to transcendence of mourning and melancholia is not achieved, in the *Commedia*, through an epiphanic leap, but rather through a work of mourning or progressive detachment from one’s loved ones and absolute focus on God. The reappearance of Beatrice at the end of the *Vita nuova* short-circuits this process in a manner that seems ultimately unsatisfactory to Dante. The glimpse of Beatrice regained in the *Vita nuova* does not lead directly to a vision of Paradise but must be re-experienced through the loss and disorientation of *Infèrno* I and the slow journey to Beatrice (at the top of the mountain of Purgatory) and God (at both the pinnacle and centre of *Paradiso*). While the *Vita nuova* already begins to transform an inability to ‘move on’ or ‘get over’ Beatrice from a symptom of melancholia to a sign of virtuous constancy, this transformation must be affirmed and clarified in the *Commedia*’s own, more rigorous and structured fashion.

## Endings in Dante and Proust

These irreconcilable differences between resurrection in Dante and in Proust are confirmed by the fact that the re-appearance of Beatrice leads to a further vision, this time ‘an “upwards” movement’ of Dante’s sigh to Heaven as recounted in the again ‘epiphanic’<sup>579</sup> ‘Oltre la spera’, which confirms the *Vita nuova*’s proposal of ‘una conclusione non elegiaca, ma mistica’.<sup>580</sup> In Proust, there is no such movement of transcendence. This further final vision of Beatrice brings the ‘libello’ to a close:<sup>581</sup>

Appresso questo sonetto apparve a me una mirabile visione, ne la quale io vidi cose, che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io non potesse più degnamente trattare di lei. E di venire a ciò io studio quanto posso, sì com’ella sae veracemente. Sì che, se piacere sarà di colui a cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita duri per alquanti anni, io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d’alcuna. E poi piaccia a colui che è sire de la cortesia, che la mia anima se ne possa gire a vedere la gloria de la sua donna, cioè di quella benedetta Beatrice, la quale gloriosamente mira ne la faccia di colui *qui est per omnia secula benedictus*. (VN XLII)

Dante interrupts the narrative of the *Vita nuova* at its close with the expressed aim of seeking a new style that is more personal to Beatrice. In this way, the story remains unfinished, cut short by the concern that his language has so far not been unique enough. As Chapter Three charts, the *Commedia* restates and accepts this failure (*Par.XXX.16-33*) as inevitable but ultimately unimportant. In order to write the *Commedia*, Dante goes on speaking despite the injunction to ‘non dire più’.

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<sup>579</sup> Michelangelo Picone, ‘Theories of Love and the Lyric Tradition from Dante’s *Vita nuova* to Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*’, *Romance Notes*, 34 (Autumn 1998), 83-93 (p. 86). In particular, Picone contrasts the visions that start and end the *Vita nuova* (from the *fol’amor* of ‘A ciascun’alma presa’ to the *fin’amor* of ‘Oltre la spera’), and reads *RVF* 16 against Dante’s ‘Deh peregrine’ so as to highlight the antithetical views of love of Petrarch and Dante.

<sup>580</sup> Sergio Cristaldi, *La ‘Vita nuova’ e la restituzione del narrare* (Messina: Rubbettino, 1994), p. 85.

<sup>581</sup> I do not examine the subsequent reappearance of Beatrice in *Purgatorio*, having considered this in Chapters One and Two, although this episode obviously has analogies with the two epiphanies with which the *Vita nuova* closes. See Corrado Bologna, *Il ritorno di Beatrice: Simmetrie dantesche fra ‘Vita nova’, ‘petrose’ e ‘Commedia’* (Rome: Salerno, 1998).

The interrupted, self-critical ending of the *Vita nuova* is a far cry from the ecstatic close of the *Commedia*, although there are several important constants uniting the two scenes. Firstly, on a thematic level, both works end with a vision of God, even if this is desired as mediated by Beatrice at the end of the *Vita nuova* (Dante wishes to look at Beatrice looking at God), whereas it is achieved directly by Dante-pilgrim only at the end of the *Commedia*. As Charles Singleton observes, although misconstruing somewhat Beatrice as deliberately blocking Dante's view, 'Beatrice is the way to God in the *Vita nuova* even as in *Paradiso*. Only, in the *Vita nuova*, she does not step aside.'<sup>582</sup>

Secondly, on a narrative level, the ends of the two works each represent a moment in which protagonist and narrator coincide. Just as 'In this chapter then, the author of the *Vita nuova*'s poems essentially "catches up" with the book's narrator',<sup>583</sup> so at the end of the *Commedia*, Dante-pilgrim becomes Dante-poet. In the *Commedia*, this creates a particularly neat sense of circularity, since the pilgrim is now ready to write down his experiences in the form which the reader has just finished perusing. In the *Vita nuova*, the complex, different levels of narration (principally, older poet, past narrator, and present scribe-commentator) defeat any such retrospective circularity, but, as Toby Levers notes, there is a harmonious coincidence at the end of these competing voices into one.

Thirdly, both works demonstrate a strong sense of closure. In the *Vita nuova*, this is achieved by this coalescence of narrative voices, as by the promise to 'non dir più' and the shift to Latin in the final lines. In the *Commedia*, the device of 'stelle' which ends all three *cantiche* is a decisive signal that the work has come to an end (and in a

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<sup>582</sup> Singleton, *An Essay on the 'Vita nuova'*, p. 102.

<sup>583</sup> Toby Levers, 'The Image of Authorship in the Final Chapter of the *Vita nuova*', *Italian Studies*, 57 (2002), 5-19 (p. 17).

culture at times lacking authorial control over texts this device effectively prevents any additions, just as the interlocking *terza rima* protects the poem from interpolations within the text itself).<sup>584</sup> There is also a sequence of reminders that the poem is drawing to a close. The first, and perhaps most explicit, is St Bernard's instruction to Dante-pilgrim: "Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna, | qui farem punto, come buon sartore | che com' elli ha del panno fa la gonna" (*Par.XXXII.139-41*).<sup>585</sup> Dante's concern with the materiality of literary production, expressed here through the image of dress-making, returns, interestingly, in Proust, whose narrator comments at a similar moment of impending closure, 'je bâtirais mon livre, je n'ose pas dire ambitieusement comme une cathédrale, mais tout simplement comme une robe' (*ALR IV:610*). In the final *canto* of *Paradiso*, this desire for an appropriate ending is revealed in the self-reflexive insistence on endings ('fine', 'finii') and desire ('disii', 'desiderio'), creating a sort of chiasmus, in the following lines: 'E io ch'al fine di tutt' i disii | appropinquava, sì com' io dovea, | l'ardor del desiderio in me finii' (*Par.XXXIII.46-8*). As Dante-pilgrim approaches the endpoint of all his desires (God), so Dante-poet draws ever nearer to the end of his poem, and in the end closure for both is absolute.<sup>586</sup> This sense of finality is heightened by imagery of a completed book: 'Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna, | legato con amore in un volume, | ciò che per l'universo si squaderna' (*Par.XXXIII.85-7*).

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<sup>584</sup> On the word 'stelle' as 'a built-in *explicit*', see John Ahern, 'Dante's Last Word: The Comedy as a *liber coelestis*', *Dante Studies*, 102 (1984), 1-14 (p. 2). On the *terza rima*, see Zygmunt G. Barański, 'The Poetics of Meter: *Terza rima*, "Canto", "Canzon", "Cantica"', in *Dante Now: Current Trends in Dante Studies*, ed. by Theodore J. Cachey, Jr (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 3-41.

<sup>585</sup> On the complex image of sleep here, see Giovanni Nencioni, "Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna (*Par.XXXII.139*), *Studi danteschi*, 40 (1963), 50-6.

<sup>586</sup> For an interesting perspective on Dante's achievement of closure in the *Commedia* in contrast to Aquinas, see Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, 'Closure in Paradise: Dante Outsings Aquinas', *Modern Language Notes*, 115 (2000), 1-12.

Dante's final image of the 'volume' can be read, as Peter Dronke suggests, as referring to both 'the divine Book of Life and his own book, his *Commedia*'.<sup>587</sup>

'The circle is now complete', as Piero Boitani comments of the final line of the *Commedia*.<sup>588</sup> It is important to note that this sense of circularity is heightened by the repeated recourse to images of circles and encircling in the final *canto*, particularly in relation to the Trinity (which is imagined as 'tre giri', *Par.XXXIII.116* and as a 'circulazion', *Par.XXXIII.127*), as well as in reference to ineffability ('Qual è 'l geomètra che tutto s'affige | per misurar lo cerchio [...] | tal era io', *Par.XXXIII.133-6*) and, finally, in the description of Dante's own orbit in harmony with God and world ('come rota', *Par.XXXIII.144*).<sup>589</sup> Given such imagery it is inevitable that the reader should also intuit a further circle, that of the passage from Dante-pilgrim who at the end of his journey is now ready to become Dante-poet and go back to the very beginning of his story. This sense of circularity is inescapable, despite the logical necessity of recognising that the two levels of narration are, in truth, superimposed. As Freccero reminds us, 'In reality, [...]

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<sup>587</sup> Peter Dronke, *Sources of Inspiration: Studies in Literary Transformation, 400-1500* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1997), p. 144. See also, on this image, Marguerite Mills Chiarenza, "'Legato con amore in un volume'", in *Dante e la Bibbia: Atti del convegno internazionale promosso da 'Bibbia', Firenze, 26-27-28 settembre 1986*, ed. by Giovanni Barblan (Florence: Olschki, 1988), pp. 227-34; John Ahern, 'Binding the Book: Hermeneutics and Manuscript Production in *Paradiso XXXIII*', *PMLA*, 97 (1982), 800-9, and 'What Did the First Copies of the *Comedy* Look Like?', *Dante for the New Millennium*, pp. 1-15; Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 157-66. It is interesting to note, following John Ahern, that Dante was never to see the *Commedia* in his lifetime as one 'volume', given that he wrote and distributed his poem in groups of up to six *canti* at a time, as was normal for dissemination of poetry at the time. Proust, too, like Dante, was denied the pleasure of seeing the *Recherche* published in one volume, lamenting already in 1913 (before the novel had reached its final proportions) in a letter to Henry Bordeaux, 'le gros livre que j'ai écrit [...] ne pourra paraître en un volume, faute de volumes assez gros', *Corr.* XII, p. 142 (letter 63, [peu après le 16 avril 1913]). The one-volume *Quarto* edition of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard, 1999) perhaps belatedly satisfies such a desire.

<sup>588</sup> Piero Boitani, 'The Sibyl's Leaves: A Study of *Paradiso XXXIII*', *Dante Studies*, 96 (1978), 83-126 (p. 121), and *The Tragic and the Sublime in Medieval Literature*, pp. 223-49.

<sup>589</sup> On this circle imagery, see Edward Hagman, 'Dante's Vision of God: The End of the *Itinerarium Mentis*', *Dante Studies*, 106 (1988), 1-20, and John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, pp. 245-57.

the experience of the pilgrim and the creation of the authorial voice take place at the same time, in the writing of the poem'.<sup>590</sup>

Both the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia*, nonetheless, temper this sense of circularity, closure, and finality with an openness to the future. This is clearer, perhaps, from the former, which explicitly points beyond itself to a future time and to a future literary endeavour, so that, in the words of Robin Kirkpatrick, 'the *Vita Nuova* as a whole remains a notably open text, deferring its own conclusion to an indefinite future'.<sup>591</sup> As Giorgio Bárberi Squarotti notes, 'il "libro de la memoria" stinge nel libro futuro', and thereby remains open to interpretation.<sup>592</sup>

The *Commedia*, similarly, places great emphasis on the future. Dante's vision of eternity in the *Commedia* is strongly marked by a sense not only of the past (past literature, the past which the souls recount, the pilgrim's sinful past) but also of the future (principally, in eschatological terms, that of the Second Coming and the Day of Judgement). Like the close of the *Vita nuova*, the *Commedia* ultimately places Dante's final and permanent reunion with Beatrice in a promised and certain future: "sarei meco senza fine cive | di quella Roma onde Cristo è romano" (*Purg.*XXXII.101-2). This focus on the future is part of Dante's creation of time and difference – narrativity – in a realm (*Paradiso*) that ought really to be atemporal and undifferentiated but would then be unnarratable.<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>590</sup> Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, p. 120.

<sup>591</sup> 'Dante and the Politics of Singularity', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 32:1 (Spring 1990), 101-19 (p. 110). See also, on the *Vita nuova* as 'purposefully unfinished', Richard Lansing, 'The Formal Structure of the *Vita nuova*', in 'Accessus ad Auctores', pp. 77-92 (p. 85). On the critical debate surrounding the end of the *Vita nuova*, see Harrison, *The Body of Beatrice*, pp. 144-57.

<sup>592</sup> *L'artificio dell'eternità* (Verona: Fiorini, 1972), p. 38.

<sup>593</sup> See Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy*, pp. 166-93.

Within this general outline of the construction of closure in the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia*, I would argue that Dante's representation of grief plays an important structural role. The *Commedia*, as I explored in Chapter One, enacts a going beyond infernal melancholia and purgatorial mourning, thereby bringing both the work of mourning and the state of melancholia to a decisive end. This teleological depiction of the successful arrival at an endpoint, that of leaving grief behind, shifts the emphasis from the past to the future, to a future, that is, of joyous reunion. Such a belief in the possible, achievable finality of emotional states is strengthened by and even perhaps allows for the *Commedia*'s strong sense of poetic closure from *cantica* to *cantica* as well as within the text as a whole. The *Commedia* might, then, be said to follow a model of sublimation analogous to Freud's, but where for Freud anti-social sexual instincts and uncontrolled emotions (whether desire or grief) are defused and transcended into a culturally appropriate form, this transcendence in Dante serves the requirements (Bersani would say prejudices) of both society and religion, the two being ideally never far apart for the poet. By writing the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia*, Dante transcends his mourning for Beatrice and subsumes this into writing; he accepts the need to lose Beatrice temporarily but is reassured by the certain hope of eventual reunion and consoles himself in the meantime with poetry. In Kristeva's terms, Dante's position is identifiable with the successful mourner who realises '« parce que j'accepte de la perdre, je ne l'ai pas perdue (voici la dénégarion), je peux la récupérer dans le langage »' (SN, p. 55). This pattern of sublimation seems to be encapsulated early on in the *Vita nuova*, in the anachronism whereby the greeting's effect on the protagonist is described only once it has been lost. Dante signals the incongruity of this order by marking his description of the greeting, coming as it does after Beatrice's shunning of the protagonist, as digressive: 'E uscendo

alquanto del proposito presente, voglio dare a intendere quello che lo suo salutare in me vertuosamente operava' (VN x, 3). This pattern suggests that loss can be counterbalanced or even overcome by language, and even that language is made possible by loss.

In Proust, there is a much more fraught relationship between language and loss, and this has a direct impact on the closure achieved and desired in the *Recherche*. At first glance, Proust's novel appears to be circular in structure. In microtextual terms, the final word 'Temps' (ALR IV:625) brings the reader back full circle to the first word of the work, 'Longtemps' (ALR I:3), while in macrotextual terms the first and last volumes are intimately related since they (or at least significant parts thereof) were planned and written at the same time, around 1909-10. We might be tempted to label this strong sense of closure and circularity Dantean, given my comments above, but this would be to ignore Eugenio Montale's warning that 'Poeta concentrico, Dante non può fornire modelli a un mondo che si allontana progressivamente dal centro e si dichiara in perenne espansione'.<sup>594</sup> Montale's words seem particularly apt in relationship to Proust's novel, which indeed after an initial desire for structural circularity, likewise ended up 'in perenne espansione', limited only by Proust's death, as witnessed by the ever-accumulating middle volumes of the *Recherche*, which were not part of the original

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<sup>594</sup> Eugenio Montale, *Sulla poesia* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1976), p. 33.

plan.<sup>595</sup> From Dante to Proust we move, then, from a concentric cosmos to what might be termed a ‘chaosmos’.<sup>596</sup>

Stefano Agosti is, therefore, perspicacious in describing the *Recherche* as ‘un libro non tanto “aperto” e nemmeno interrotto quanto rigorosamente chiuso e tuttavia interminabile’.<sup>597</sup> Proust’s novel has an over-arching, self-contained structure, which paradoxically allows for endless writing; as Jean-Yves Tadié reminds us, Proust does put *fin* at the end of his manuscript, suggesting the achievement of closure, yet he writes this before the novel is finished, undermining this suggestion.<sup>598</sup> In so doing Proust seems to have achieved his desire to combine both incompleteness and unity, a combination which his narrator admires in nineteenth-century masterpieces such as Wagner’s *Tetralogy* or Balzac’s *Comédie humaine*:

Je songeais combien tout de même ces œuvres participent à ce caractère d’être – bien que merveilleusement – toujours incomplètes, qui est le caractère de toutes les grandes œuvres du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle ; du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle dont les plus grands écrivains ont manqué leurs livres, mais, se regardant travailler comme s’ils étaient à la fois l’ouvrier et le juge, ont tiré de cette auto-contemplation une beauté nouvelle, extérieure et supérieure à l’œuvre, lui imposant rétroactivement une unité, une grandeur qu’elle n’a pas. (*ALR* III:666)

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<sup>595</sup> It is appropriate, then, that the Albertine volumes are explored under the title *Marcel Proust: écrire sans fin*, ed. by Rainer Warning and Jean Milly (Paris: CNRS, 1996). I disagree, evidently, with Georges Cattaui’s assertion that ‘Par ses sphères, ses cercles concentriques, ses paliers et ses plans, par toute sa savante structure aux formes enchevêtrée[s], imbriquées, alternées, l’ordonnance du roman de Proust s’apparente à la *Divine Comédie* de Dante’, ‘L’Œuvre de Proust et son architecture symbolique’, *Art et Pensée*, 1 (May 1956), unpaginated, [3–8] (p. [7]). Cited in Bales, *Proust and the Middle Ages*, p. 122.

<sup>596</sup> I take this neologism from Umberto Eco, *The Middle Ages of James Joyce: The Aesthetics of Chaosmos*, trans. by Ellen Esrock (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), in the original Italian: *Le poetiche di Joyce: Dalla ‘Summa’ al ‘Finnegans Wake’* (Milan: Bompiani, 1966). See also Cristina Farronato, *Eco’s Chaosmos: From the Middle Ages to Postmodernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

<sup>597</sup> Agosti, *Realtà e metafora*, p. 32. See also his ‘Opera interrotta e opera interminabile’, in *A partire da ‘Petrolio’: Pasolini interroga la letteratura*, ed. by Carla Benedetti and Maria Antonietta Grignani (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1995), pp. 113–20.

<sup>598</sup> Jean-Yves Tadié, ‘Proust et l’inachèvement’, in *Le Manuscrit inachevé: écriture, création, communication*, ed. by Louis Hay (Paris: CNRS, 1986), pp. 75–85 (p. 84). In this essay, Tadié also highlights incompleteness as typical of Proust prior to the *Recherche*, citing the examples of works such as *Jean Santeuil* and *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. See also Nathalie Mauriac Dyer, ‘Un drame de l’inachèvement: *A la recherche du temps perdu*’, in *L’Œuvre inachevée: Actes du Colloque International (11 et 12 décembre 1998)*, ed. by Annie Rivara and Guy Lavorel (Paris: CEDIC, 1999), pp. 227–36.

Of course, the unity that the *Recherche* achieves is not necessarily retrospective, since as already noted the first and last volumes were written at the same time, postulating a hidden unity from the start. This unity is, however, experienced by the reader perhaps only retrospectively, as is evident from the initial reactions of readers many of whom leapt to criticise Proust's lack of unity and overarching design.

In this endlessness, it is my contention that the form of the *Recherche* reflects and stages the interminability of its grief-stricken content. Mirroring the unstable, oscillating rhythm of 'demi-deuil', Proust's novel is, as Agosti notes, both 'chiuso' and 'interminabile', both finished and unfinished, both open and closed. Crucially, the novel's structure functions as a performance of its thematic concerns; the two are mutually formative and interpenetrative. In Proust, the refusal of an end of mourning is concomitant with a refusal of a total end to narrative, just as in the Dantean model, albeit by contrast, the clear end of mourning is paralleled by a decisive end to writing. The Proustian intermittent interminability of grief both makes possible and is made possible by the novel's own interminability within its closed structure. In the *Recherche*, the relationship to the deceased other is perpetuated erratically, contradictorily, and unstably, following the rhythm of Derridean 'demi-deuil' explored in the previous chapter, and this same rhythm functions at the level of both plot and narration. Through the unpredictability and creativity of mournful involuntary memory, Proust's novel oscillates between seeming finished and seeming interminable or, in Gérard Genette's choice of word, '*inépuisable*',<sup>599</sup> and this ultimate inexhaustibility of writing has repercussions on the ethics of melancholia as an impossibly yet necessarily inexhaustible attachment to the lost love object.

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<sup>599</sup> Gérard Genette, 'La Question de l'écriture', in *Recherche de Proust*, pp. 7-12 (p. 9).

In this respect the relationship between mourning and writing is one of perpetuation and continuity, as Anna Elsner has noted: ‘The mourning process seemingly finds its extension in creativity, as the former has as its arrival point the re-instantiation or re-creation of the lost object and this point represents precisely the point of departure for the creative process’.<sup>600</sup> This relationship can be helpfully further defined by returning to concepts of sublimation outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Within the concept of creativity as an ‘extension’ of mourning, for instance, echoes can be heard of Bersani’s reformulation of sublimation as, precisely, ‘an extending of desire’.<sup>601</sup> Through this reformulation, as I have already examined, Bersani is attempting to refute and overthrow the accepted Freudian model of sublimation in which art is an effective means of transcending and de-sexualising desire. As regards mourning (itself an expression and experience of desire), Freudian sublimation is consistent with the teleology of the work of mourning (which has a specific endpoint and requires that the libido be decathected and redirected), whereas Bersani’s stance concerning sublimation comes close instead to the unending perpetuation of attachment enabled by Derrida’s ‘demi-deuil’.

Bersani’s resistance to and criticism of the concept of artistic redemption is consistent with his polemic against Freudian sublimation, which is, similarly, a form of redemption of experience (desire) through its transformation into art. For Bersani, such a justification of the utility of art is dangerously reductive and repressive, and a betrayal of the complexities of both life and art. In *The Culture of Redemption*, Bersani complains that ‘apparently acceptable views of art’s beneficently reconstructive function in culture

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<sup>600</sup> Anna M. Elsner, ‘21. Tracing the Presence of an Absence’, p. 286.

<sup>601</sup> Bersani, *The Freudian Body*, p. 47.

depend on a devaluation of historical experience and of art'<sup>602</sup> and sets out to counteract such views. Within these challenges to Freudian thought and aesthetic theory more generally, Proust is a specific target of Bersani's criticisms. Bersani attacks the *Recherche* for its 'mortuary aesthetic'<sup>603</sup> (the way in which it places the death of others at the centre of artistic redemption) and for its adherence to this castigated 'culture of redemption' (that is, the belief that art is able to redeem life and even death). Bersani states, paradoxically, that 'In Proust, art simultaneously erases, repeats, and redeems life',<sup>604</sup> and all three different attitudes to life would seem to be, for Bersani, equally reductive (as well as contradictory) ways of approaching experience.

Bersani is able to rescue Proust from such criticisms only by noting that many of the novel's philosophical or aesthetic assertions are not borne out by the main text and that Proust's theory is more conservative than his practice: 'The narrator's theorizing about his own work often seems inadequate to describe what he has done'.<sup>605</sup> It seems to me, however, that there is evidence in the *Recherche* to suggest that Proust's view of the role or achievement of art might be closer to Bersanian sublimation than at first appears. Firstly, the narrator wants his art to be a faithful representation of his experience, however painful, and is almost disappointed at the triumphalistic tone of Wagner, in whose music the joy of creativity risks overshadowing the painful reality which was the original source of inspiration. The narrator laments that 'Chez [Wagner], quelle que soit la tristesse du poète, elle est consolée, surpassée – c'est-à-dire malheureusement un peu détruite – par l'allégresse du fabricant' (*ALR* III:667). This would suggest that Proust is,

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<sup>602</sup> Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, p. 1.

<sup>603</sup> Leo Bersani, '1922, 18 November: Death of Marcel Proust: Death and Literary Authority', in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. by Denis Hollier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 861–6 (p. 862).

<sup>604</sup> Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, p. 11.

<sup>605</sup> *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 213.

like Bersani, resistant to a Freudian model of sublimation in which experience is transcended ('surpassée') and therefore devalued (or even 'détruite') through its transmutation into art. Secondly, the narrator even presents art as a continuation of desire and suffering, remarking that 'on ne songe pas assez que la vie de l'écrivain n'est pas terminée avec cette œuvre, que la même nature qui lui a fait avoir telles souffrances, lesquelles sont entrées dans son œuvre, cette nature continuera de vivre après l'œuvre terminée' (*ALR* IV:482-3). According to this understanding of art, writing is not transformative or life-changing; it cannot alter one's fidelity to past suffering and the endlessly repeating pattern of one's own personality. It does not mark a change or endpoint, in the way that it does in Dante. Literature may be, for Proust, 'La vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, la seule vie par conséquent pleinement vécue' (*ALR* IV:474), but it is nonetheless very far from constituting a *Vita nuova*, a new, strange, young, or different life, as it does for Dante.

Nonetheless, the *Recherche* and the *Vita nuova* remain comparable in the recourse each has to the image of the book of memory from which their own writing (whether true or new or both) in some way derives.<sup>606</sup> The *Vita nuova* opens with an image of the book of memory from which the following, shorter text is transcribed, amended, and extended:

In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria dinanzi a la quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice: *Incipit vita nova*. Sotto la quale rubrica

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<sup>606</sup> On the symbol of the book see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 302-47 (and, on Dante, especially pp. 326-32); Maria Corti, *Percorsi dell'invenzione: Il linguaggio poetico e Dante* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), pp. 27-50; and Eric Jager, 'The Book of the Heart: Reading and Writing the Medieval Subject', *Speculum*, 71:1 (January 1996), 1-26. Curtius, understandably, does not mention Proust, but Richard Bales does draw attention to the importance of the image of the book in both Dante and Proust, with reference to Curtius, in *Proust and the Middle Ages*, pp. 131-4. Closer to Proust's own time and context, but without reference to the *Recherche*, Évanghélia Stead explores the book as material object in *La Chair du livre: matérialité, imaginaire et poétique du livre fin-de-siècle* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2012).

io trovo scritte le parole le quali è mio intendimento d'assemblare in questo libello; e se non tutte, almeno la loro sentenza. (VN I)

The *Commedia*, too, claims to take its subject matter from the 'libro che 'l preterito rassegna' (*Par.*XXIII.54), from the poet's memory of the pilgrim's experience, while the final volume of the *Recherche* contemplates a similar book of memory from which the protagonist's own book will be taken:

Quant au livre intérieur de signes inconnus (de signes en relief, semblait-il, que mon attention, explorant mon inconscient, allait chercher, heurtait, contournait, comme un plongeur qui sonde), pour la lecture desquels personne ne pouvait m'aider d'aucune règle, cette lecture consistait en un acte de création où nul ne peut nous suppléer ni même collaborer avec nous. (*ALR* IV:458)

This book is, like Dante's 'libro de la [...] memoria', accessible to only one reader,<sup>607</sup> and this reader is a notably active, creative reader who rather than transcribing faithfully from this exemplar, will instead undertake a significant portion of interpretation and rewriting. Proust's eventual image in this respect is not the Dantean one of a commentator or scribe,<sup>608</sup> but rather that of a translator: 'ce livre essentiel, le seul livre vrai, un grand écrivain n'a pas, dans le sens courant, à l'inventer puisqu'il existe déjà en chacun de nous, mais à le traduire. Le devoir et la tâche d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur' (*ALR* IV:469).<sup>609</sup> Bales notes that 'It is true that Proust employs the term "translator" instead of "scribe" or "copyist", but the sense remains much the same'.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>607</sup> Singleton notes that 'no one other than this scribe can ever have access to the original of this book. All that we shall ever see of that original is the copy which he will now make for us, and we must submit to his will almost as to that of an author.' *An Essay on the 'Vita nuova'*, p. 28.

<sup>608</sup> On Dante as *scriptor*, *compiler*, and *commentator*, see Michelangelo Picone, 'Leggere la *Commedia* di Dante', in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone, 3 vols (Florence: Casati, 2000-02), I: *Inferno*, pp. 13-25, and 'Strutture poetiche e strutture prosastiche nella *Vita nuova*', *Modern Language Notes*, 92 (1977), 117-29.

<sup>609</sup> On Proust and translation more generally, see Edward Bizub, *La Venise intérieure: Proust et la poétique de la traduction* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1991).

<sup>610</sup> Proust and the Middle Ages, p. 133. Concomitant with this view (that translation and transcribing are almost identical) is Bales's assumption that *Le Temps retrouvé* details 'the nature of this novel (which, of course, we have just read)' (*Proust and the Middle Ages*, p. 118), an assumption which I also challenge in this chapter. The image of the book in Proust is explored (without reference to Dante) in Joëlle Gleize, *Le Double Miroir: le livre dans les livres de Stendhal à Proust* (Paris: Hachette, 1992), pp. 217-43. Guillaume Perrier argues that

There seems, however, to be a greater gap and a greater interpretive effort in the act of translation rather than that of copying.

In the final *canto* of the *Paradiso*, as already noted, Dante-poet contemplates the ‘volume’, God’s book of existence and his own book about to be finished. In the final volume of the *Recherche*, however, Proust’s narrator is able only to imagine a future, unwritten book. As Vladimir Nabokov comments, ‘Within the novel the narrator Marcel contemplates, in the last volume, the ideal novel he will write. Proust’s work is only a copy of that ideal novel – but what a copy!’<sup>611</sup> The situation in the *Recherche* appears, then, to be closer to that of the *Vita nuova*, in that the internal book of memory is inaccessible, and the reader is presented with only a copy of that book. It seems to me that the image of the ‘livre intérieur’ is already suggestive of the irreducible gap between plan and product, between ‘ideal’ and ‘copy’, highlighted by the discontinuity between narrator and protagonist in the *Recherche*. Yet I would take Nabokov’s observation one step further and maintain that the *Recherche* is not merely, in this sense, a copy, but indeed a copy of a copy; it is the narrator’s copy of the protagonist’s unwritten copy of the illegible ‘livre intérieur’. The *Recherche* ends as the protagonist prepares to pick up the narrator’s pen, yet this is not an action that happens within the novel, but rather is placed in an unrealisable, desired future. The narrator’s record is all we will ever have of this book.

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Proust constructs ‘Un nouvel art de la mémoire’ with the *Recherche*, but does not mention any possible Dantean model. See *La Mémoire du lecteur: essai sur ‘Albertine disparue’ et ‘Le Temps retrouvé’* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011), pp. 149–212. Adam Watt discusses this image of the book and associated terminology (*déchiffrer*, *interpréter*, *lire*, and so forth, but not – I note – any Dantean *copier*) in *Reading in Proust’s ‘À la recherche’*, pp. 140–5 (and p. 155 for the image of translator). That the inner book might be an image of the unconscious is explored by Robin Mackenzie, ‘Proust’s “livre intérieur”’, in *Modernism and the European Unconscious*, ed. by Peter Collier and Judy Davies (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1990), pp. 149–64.

<sup>611</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, ‘Marcel Proust (1871–1922): *The Walk by Swann’s Place* (1913)’, in *Lectures on Literature*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 2 vols (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), I, pp. 206–49 (pp. 210–11).

The question of how far the book the protagonist of *Le Temps retrouvé* plans to write is to be equated with the book that we are about to finish reading, that is, with the *Recherche* itself, is of great importance to any reading of Proust, and particularly to one that seeks Dantean parallels and divergences. It is question that has divided critics and which has been answered differently at different moments of critical history, as Florian Pennanech has explored.<sup>612</sup> Pennanech demonstrates that while thematic critics of the *Recherche* such as Georges Poulet and Jean Rousset tend to argue for the circularity of the *Recherche* (the transformation of the protagonist into the narrator of the book we have just read),<sup>613</sup> structuralist critics more often than not refute such arguments and prefer instead to highlight the gap between protagonist and narrator. Barthes, for instance, speaks of the protagonist's literary project as 'un livre que nous ne connaissons pas mais dont l'annonce est le livre même de Proust'.<sup>614</sup> Such a view of Proust's novel can be traced back to one of Proust's earliest and most perceptive critics, Beckett, who was perhaps the first to recognise that 'The book is the search, stated in the full complexity of all its clues and blind alleys, for that resolution, and not the *compte rendu* after the event, of a round trip.'<sup>615</sup> It is also a view shared by Germaine Brée, who asserts that 'le point où débouche le narrateur à la fin du roman n'est pas superposable le moins du monde à son point de départ',<sup>616</sup> and by Peter Brooks, who comments that:

The book he proposes to write, under the shadow of impending death, is not, I think, the book we have just read. For his future book proposes to be the book

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<sup>612</sup> Florian Pennanech, '18. *Le Temps retrouvé* et la Nouvelle Critique: le problème de l'achèvement', in '*Le Temps retrouvé*' *Eighty Years After/80 ans après*, pp. 239-53.

<sup>613</sup> See, for instance, Georges Poulet's *L'Espace proustien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), or Jean Rousset's obsession with Proust and circles in *Forme et signification: essais sur les structures littéraires de Corneille à Claudel* (Paris: J. Corti, 1962), pp. 135-70.

<sup>614</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Proust et les noms', p. 121.

<sup>615</sup> Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (London: John Calder, 1983), p. 65. In such terms, the *Commedia* would, in contrast, be 'a round trip'.

<sup>616</sup> *Du temps perdu au temps retrouvé: introduction à l'œuvre de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1950), p. 27.

of truth, of revelation, of joyous discovery. Whereas the book we have just read is the narrative of error, of wandering, of getting things wrong and achieving only glimpses of a truth to come.<sup>617</sup>

It is thus evident from such a perspective that Proust's novel is not truly 'self-begetting', in the sense of a novel that 'projects the illusion of art creating itself' and recounts 'the development of a character to the point at which he is able to take up his pen and compose the novel we have just finished reading'.<sup>618</sup> Instead, the *Recherche* might, at most, be considered to be self-conceiving in an as yet unfulfilled fashion.

It is interesting to note, within such a plethora of critical views, that Bersani himself will move from a position which assumes 'that the book we are reading is the book the narrator speaks of writing in *Le Temps retrouvé*'<sup>619</sup> to a more ambivalent position, writing in *Balzac to Beckett*:

At the end of *Le Temps retrouvé*, we can therefore feel that the narrator has in fact already written the work he has just outlined, and yet we can perhaps also agree with Germaine Brée's contention that only now is the narrator ready to begin that work. For nothing in what we have read *realizes* the narrator's literary ambitions, and everything that we have read suggests that what he might have gone on to write would have continued to illustrate the self's admirable talent for diversifying and multiplying its fictions. The inconclusiveness of *A la Recherche du temps perdu* is the narrator's – and Proust's – courageous gamble on the quality of life which this refusal to be defined and limited by the 'lost time' of our past can produce.<sup>620</sup>

Even within *Fictions of Life and Art*, Bersani's assertion that 'the act of writing creates new feelings, can never be simply a translation of states of mind that exist before the

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<sup>617</sup> Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 203–4.

<sup>618</sup> Kellman, *The Self-Begetting Novel*, p. 3 (pp. 12–31 discuss more fully 'Marcel's Self-Begetting Novel'). For Kellman, as for Poulet and unlike Brée, at the end of Proust's novel '[p]rotagonist and narrator, distinct throughout, finally merge' (p. 15), giving the *Recherche* a circular structure. Kristeva, too, talks about 'la fin bouclée d'*A la recherche du temps perdu*', which she suggests is a 'spirale fermée', *Le Temps sensible*, p. 14.

<sup>619</sup> *Fictions of Life and Art*, p. 244.

<sup>620</sup> On this passage, see Leo Bersani, *Balzac to Beckett: Center and Circumference in French Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 192–239. On Bersani's relationship to Proust more generally, see Malcolm Bowie, 'Bersani on Proust', *Oxford Literary Review*, 20 (1998), 23–32.

moment of writing'<sup>621</sup> might be considered to suggest that the protagonist's envisaged book can never be written, since were it to be attempted, it would inevitably differ from its projected content and structure. This is certainly a view that Bersani's later assertion confirms, arguing that it is not possible for a book to be merely a record of a past life, since writing is unavoidably transformative, divergent, subversive, and unpredictable. In this sense the protagonist's book is not only unwritten within the time frame of the story of the *Recherche*, but even in essence unwriteable, except insofar as the narrator's story can retrospectively be seen involuntarily to fulfil any of the protagonist's literary goals and aspirations. The protagonist's book can only exist in potentiality; paradoxically, its impossibility is its very condition of existence.

It is even more interesting to note, in relationship to the choices of primary texts of this thesis, that this question of the status of the planned book in *Le Temps retrouvé* has been shown to have important implications for Dantean readings of the *Recherche*, as revealed by a debate between Joshua Landy and Gian Balsamo in *Poetics Today*. Balsamo asserts that just as in the *Commedia* Dante-pilgrim becomes Dante-narrator at the end through divine intervention and the help of Beatrice, so Proust's protagonist at the end of the *Recherche* becomes the narrator of the book we have just read, thanks to the apparition of Mlle de Saint-Loup in *Le Temps retrouvé*.<sup>622</sup> Landy, however, rejects any such perceived consonance and challenges in particular the pivotal role Balsamo attributes to the marginal character of Mlle de Saint-Loup, who in fact appears only once the decision to write has been taken. In contrast to Balsamo, Landy finds it 'surely a little absurd to think of Marcel laboriously recopying – or perhaps inadvertently

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<sup>621</sup> *Fictions of Life and Art*, p. 18.

<sup>622</sup> Gian Balsamo, 'The Fiction of Marcel Proust's Autobiography'.

reinventing, word by word – the material of his memoir’,<sup>623</sup> thereby refuting the idea that the book the protagonist writes is the one we have read and coming close to Bersani’s argument that writing is unavoidably creative and never merely memorialising. Indeed, in his earlier *Philosophy as Fiction*, Landy ingeniously proposes that we are dealing with three texts: the protagonist’s ‘more or less completed’ autobiographical memoir (the present *récit*, which Landy calls *My Life; or, The History of a Vocation*); the protagonist’s future novel or oeuvre (started but still hazy, provisionally named by Landy *The Magic Lantern*); and Proust’s novel, the *Recherche* itself.<sup>624</sup> The text of the first and last may be apparently identical, but they have very different meanings which rely on the authorial voice to which the writing is attributed.

It is evident, from my own position outlined above, that I am closer to Landy’s interpretation of Dante in Proust than to Balsamo’s, and I also find his explanation of the different types of writing at work in the *Recherche* a convincing solution to the problem of what the *Recherche* is, if it is not the novel planned in *Le Temps retrouvé*. Ultimately, it is necessary to recognise that Proust and Dante have very different answers to problems of mortality and writing, with one vital consequence of this being that while in the *Commedia*, Dante-pilgrim becomes Dante-poet, this does not and cannot happen in the *Recherche*, where instead the gap between protagonist and narrator remains insurmountable. There are, moreover, good Derridean reasons for such a position which advocates the impossibility of writing in order to preserve its very possibility in the future. I have already noted the consonance between content and form in Derridean ‘demi-deuil’ which is intermittently closed and yet also interminable and

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<sup>623</sup> Joshua Landy, ‘A Beatrice for Proust?’, p. 615, n. 17.

<sup>624</sup> Joshua Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction: Self, Deception, and Knowledge in Proust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 43.

open to the future. The ethical praise of the openness of ‘demi-deuil’ to the unpredictable and the unforeseeable is consistent with Derrida’s attitudes towards language as promise and to the future more generally.<sup>625</sup>

The future time of the protagonist’s own writing is firmly placed in a time that in order to preserve its futurity, can never become actual, in a time, that is, which we can describe as ‘a kind of “absolute future”’ (what Derrida sometimes, often in political contexts, calls an *à-venir*, literally a to-come, rather an *avenir*) which will never be present.<sup>626</sup> In such a context, the protagonist’s book is truly a *Livre à venir*.<sup>627</sup> Derrida is keen to associate his own theoretical enterprise with this paradigmatic openness, declaring in one interview (with an acceptance of the term deconstruction that is unusual for him) that ‘L’ouverture de l’avenir vaut mieux, voilà l’axiome de la déconstruction, ce à partir de quoi elle s’est toujours mise en mouvement, et qui la lie, comme l’avenir même, à l’altérité, à la *dignité* sans prix de l’altérité, c’est-à-dire à la justice’.<sup>628</sup>

This ‘ouverture de l’avenir’ is, too, one of the achievements of Proust’s novel, and it is striking that both Proust and Derrida turn to the image of language as promise in order to represent this openness.<sup>629</sup> In the *Recherche*, the protagonist often experiences art as a promise, firstly as the ‘promesse’ of the ‘espérance mystique de l’ange écarlate du matin’ of Vinteuil’s septet (*ALR* III:767), and secondly as ‘la promesse de joie’ of ‘l’ange d’or du campanile de Saint-Marc’ (*ALR* IV:202). Likewise, the

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<sup>625</sup> A good summary of such views is Madeleine Fagan and Marie Suetsugu, ‘Conclusions: The Im/Possibility of Closure’, in *Derrida: Negotiating the Legacy*, ed. by Madeleine Fagan, Ludovic Glorieux, Indira Hašimbegović, and Marie Suetsugu (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 225–35.

<sup>626</sup> Bennington, *Not Half No End*, p. 21. See also, in the same book, ‘Beginnings and Ends’, pp. 136–8.

<sup>627</sup> I borrow this phrase from the title of Maurice Blanchot’s *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959).

<sup>628</sup> Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Échographies de la télévision: entretiens filmés* (Paris: Galilée/Institut national de l’audiovisuel, 1996), p. 29.

<sup>629</sup> See also, in relation to Dante, Derrida, and promises, Ambrosio, *Dante and Derrida*, pp. 15–49.

*Recherche* itself constitutes a promise, a promise to write which is articulated most clearly in the final volume of the novel. Yet this pledge is, as Derrida's meditations on the promise make plain, in essence unfulfillable, so as to perpetuate the very act of promising, just as Proust's protagonist's future book must remain unwritten in order to preserve a future of writing. In *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* in particular, Derrida establishes a relationship between writing, language, promise, and impossibility, asserting, for instance, that promising is 'Un acte impossible, donc le seul qui soit digne de son nom, ou plutôt qui, pour être digne de son nom, doit l'être du nom de l'autre, au nom de l'autre'.<sup>630</sup> Elsewhere Derrida will also reaffirm this relationship, declaring that 'Chaque fois que j'ouvre la bouche, chaque fois que je parle ou écris, je *promets* [...] : et cette promesse annonce l'unicité d'une langue à venir'<sup>631</sup> and that 'Elle [la promesse] ouvre alors, dans le « présent » [...], un futur non saturable, l'avance d'un à-venir que rien ne saurait fermer'.<sup>632</sup> This openness to the other represented by the promise is, as regards Proust, an openness both to the unpredictable advent of the other (through involuntary memory) and to the creative unpredictability of future writing. In concrete terms, this future of writing belongs to Proust's readers, whether that writing takes the form of further literary or critical responses.

If this philosophy of the future seems dangerously to diminish or neglect the demands and possibilities of the present, an escape – or compromise – is perhaps possible for both Proust and Derrida through a relationship to teleology that is ultimately ambivalent and, to use Derrida's term, *undecidable*. In *Limited Inc*, for example, Derrida promotes the resistance of closure as a means of challenging normative or

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<sup>630</sup> *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*, p. 144.

<sup>631</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*, p. 126.

<sup>632</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Avances', preface to Serge Margel, *Le Tombeau du dieu artisan: sur Platon* (Paris: Minuit, 1995), pp. 11–43 (p. 40).

conservative models of thought (thereby proposing a sort of brave, Keatsian negative capability of ‘being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts’).<sup>633</sup> He declares that ‘l’indécidabilité [...] a justement pour effet de rendre impossible toute totalisation, tout accomplissement, toute plénitude’, and later adds that:

La plénitude est son *telos*, mais la *structure* de son *telos* est telle que si elle l’atteint, elle disparaît avec lui, s’y paralyse, immobilise ou meurt. Le rapport au *telos* est donc nécessairement double, divisé, partagé, c’est dans cette mesure même qu’il y a du mouvement, de la vie, du langage, de l’intention, etc. La plénitude est la fin (le but) mais si on l’atteignait, ce serait la fin (la mort).<sup>634</sup>

As always, Derrida is keen to deconstruct what appear to be binary opposites (such as closure versus non-closure) in search of a different logic, which here seems to necessitate, like the very rhythm of ‘demi-deuil’, an undecidable, unstable oscillation between forward-movement (the work of mourning) and stasis (melancholia). Such a complex, divided relationship to the end is particularly pertinent for the *Recherche* which, similarly, thrives on maintaining an undecidability about whether the book we have just read is the book the protagonist plans to write, or not. I have argued that there can be no such circularity in the *Recherche*, that end and beginning do not coincide, and that writing remains, as it must to preserve its ideal potentiality, imagined and forever deferred. Nonetheless, such a reading does beg the question: what is the status of the book we have just read then if it is ostensibly written by the narrator but is not the book planned in *Le Temps retrouvé*? It is in order to answer such a question that Derrida’s description of an endless movement towards plenitude, however unreachable, is especially enlightening. By analogy, we might say that the *Recherche* charts a movement towards the coalescence of narrator and protagonist and of written book and

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<sup>633</sup> *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), I, pp. 193-4.

<sup>634</sup> *Limited Inc.*, ed. by Elisabeth Weber (Paris: Galilée, 1990), pp. 210 and 233-4.

projected book, only to refuse any such neat, over-simplistic identifications. Instead, Proust's novel stands resolutely in favour of an ethics of unpredictable interminability, both in respect of mourning ('demi-deuil') and of literary form.

*Petrarch and the end of the 'rime sparse'*

Having explored at some length the endings desired and made possible by the *Vita nuova*, the *Commedia*, and the *Recherche*, I turn now to Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, which is, too, a text overtly concerned with the possibility of making a good end. Within the contrast that I have established between Dante and Proust in terms of closure, futurity, writing, and sublimation, Petrarch holds an ambiguous position which is worth exploring in its own right as well as in order to clarify the already established Dante-Proust polarity.

If for Dante a good end is union with the Creator and with Beatrice, whereas for Proust a good end is the excitement of looking forward to an endless future of writing whilst also knowing that a certain sense of closure is assured, Petrarch's desired end stands somewhere between the two. At the end of sonnet 140, Petrarch explicitly equates a good end with a particular kind of love, in an axiomatic fashion: 'Ché bel fin fa chi ben amando more' (*RVF* 140.14). This love seems to be unfailing love for one's lady, unlike other poems in which the 'bel fine' (e.g. *RVF* 80.32) is none other than God, suggesting that loving God is the key to the happy ending of a good death. A similar ambiguity is present in a letter to Boccaccio, where Petrarch expresses the hope that '*death would find me reading or writing, or, if it please Christ, praying or*

weeping',<sup>635</sup> 'opto ut legentem aut scribentem vel, si Cristo placuerit, orantem ac plorantem mors inveniat'.<sup>636</sup> Here, Petrarch imagines the conflict between a life of poetry and a life of prayer (a conflict that runs through the *Canzoniere* and the *Secretum*, as we have seen in Chapter Two) as endless. Even the finality of death cannot bring Petrarch's fraught oscillation and paradoxical positioning between the polar demands of earthly and divine love to a close; the *vel* on which this sentence pivots suspends the possibility of any decisive action or change whatsoever.

In the *Secretum*, Franciscus perhaps expresses Petrarch's fear of leaving works unfinished:

Quid faciam ergo? Labores ne meos interruptos deseram? An accelerare consultius est, atque illis, si Deus annuat, summam manum imponere, quibus curis exutus, expeditior ad maiora proficiscar? Tantum enim ac tam sumptuosum opus vix possum equanimiter medio calle deserere. (*Secretum*, p. 206)

*What must I do then? Abandon my works in the middle? Or rather finish my works off quickly so that, God willing, I may, freed from these lesser preoccupations, devote myself to what matters more? I wouldn't be happy to abandon any work half done.* (MSB, p. 90)

The desire to continue writing is not easily renounced in Petrarch, as this quotation demonstrates. Indeed, in the opening letter of the *Familiari*, Petrarch declares 'scribendi enim michi vivendique unus, ut auguror, finis erit', 'for me writing and living are the same thing and I hope will be so to the very end'.<sup>637</sup> In fact, these last two statements when juxtaposed appear contradictory, since the only way to be engaged in a literary project on one's deathbed would presumably be, except for a miracle of timing, to leave

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<sup>635</sup> 'Sen. XVII, 2', in Francis Petrarch, *Letters of Old Age/Rerum senilium libri I-XVIII*, trans. by Aldo S. Bernardo, Saul Levin, and Reta A. Bernardo, 2 vols (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), II, pp. 644-54 (p. 654).

<sup>636</sup> Letter 11 (XVII, 2), from 'Senilium rerum libri/Le Senili', in *Prose*, pp. 1135-58 (p. 1158).

<sup>637</sup> *Familiarium rerum libri/Le Familiari*, I, p. 13 (book I, letter 1, 44-5); *Rerum familiarium libri I-VIII*, trans. by Aldo S. Bernardo (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), p. 13. Similarly, in the 'Invective contra medicum' ('*Invectives against a Physician*'), Petrarch writes 'scripsi aliqua, nec desino aut unquam desinam, dum hic digitus calamum feret', 'I have written various works, and as long as my fingers can hold a pen, I shall not cease to write'. *Invectives*, pp. 2-179 (pp. 30/31).

some work unfinished. Petrarch is therefore expressing an impossible desire for his life and his work to coincide perfectly which resonates with Proust's literary project.

This conclusion is illuminating for the *Canzoniere*, which Petrarch is known to have obsessively revised until his death. The collection appears to be complete and final, particularly with the framing structure of a proemial sonnet and the number of poems – 366 – pointing to an annual, cyclical symbolism. Yet this cyclical nature also points to the *Canzoniere* as endlessly repeating itself, rather than to any achievement of static closure. Words from 'Little Gidding' are particularly apt here: 'to make an end is to make a beginning'.<sup>638</sup> Moreover, as with Proust's novel, we can be sure that had Petrarch lived longer he would have made changes to the *Canzoniere*, however seemingly minor, and so the whole work retains an aura of incompleteness. Like the *Recherche*, Petrarch's *Canzoniere* is not so much unfinished (it has a closed, circular structure) as unfinishable. In its circularity, the collection can be interpreted as a version of 'the paradigm text' which, in Terence Cave's understanding, through the circle imagery, 'bring[s] together the notion of infinite fruitfulness and that of closure'.<sup>639</sup>

Yet this sense of incompleteness is heightened, at the same time, by a paradoxical refusal of closure that functions on a micro- and a macro-textual level in the *Canzoniere*. From poem to poem, as Barolini has shown, there is often a resistance to closure and a positing of writing as endless, for instance in the sequence of *canzoni RVF 71-3*.<sup>640</sup> Thus *RVF 72* ends up undermining any claim to its own achievement of closure or finitude: 'Canzon, l'una sorella è poco inanzi, | et l'altra sento in quel medesimo albergo | apparechiarsi; ond'io più carta vergo' (*RVF 72.76-8*). This refusal of closure works on a

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<sup>638</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems*, p. 208.

<sup>639</sup> Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 179.

<sup>640</sup> Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, pp. 193-223.

macro-textual level, meanwhile, through the inability of the lyric subject to undergo a Dantean moment of conversion that would order all his life into an irreversible pattern of *before* and *after*.<sup>641</sup> In this sense, the *Canzoniere* reads as an obsessively repetitive and monomaniacal statement of stasis, and as an achievement that is poetic and melancholic rather than moral. Olivia Holmes has suggested, for example, that the failure to convert may add to the *Canzoniere*'s claims to sincerity: 'Perhaps we are also convinced that the poems represent a single, unbroken consciousness by the very failure of the speaker's conversion.'<sup>642</sup> Pamela Williams proposes, similarly:

In this last canzone of the collection his moral conflict remains unresolved, which seems entirely appropriate in artistic terms: after the poet's profound analysis of the conflicting pulls of human and divine love in the *Canzoniere*, it would be incongruous if heroic *human* effort at the last were to tip the balance in favour of one of them.<sup>643</sup>

As with the *Recherche*, so with the *Canzoniere* a thematic of interminable melancholia is mirrored in a stylistics of interminable writing. By not concluding the *Canzoniere*, by refusing to crown his poetic collection with a Dantean, absolute, irreversible turning to God, Petrarch keeps the affection for Laura, like Proust's protagonist's affections for Albertine, forever able to resurface and challenge any hint of rejection or forgetfulness. The *Canzoniere*'s lack of closure appears to be morally reprehensible (in Dantean terms), but ethically necessary in order to perpetuate one's relationship with the deceased. Dante's solution of eliding love for one's lady and love for God is, for Petrarch, no longer possible; Petrarch's final poem is an uncertain and unconvincing refutation of Laura in the hope of turning from earthly temptation to God. St Bernard's prayer to the Virgin Mary on Dante's behalf that she might act as the

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<sup>641</sup> See Moevs, 'Subjectivity and Conversion in Dante and Petrarch'.

<sup>642</sup> Olivia Holmes, *Assembling the Lyric Self: Authorship from Troubadour Song to Italian Poetry Book* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 182.

<sup>643</sup> Williams, *Through Human Love to God*, p. 93.

pilgrim's intercessor and lead him to God is answered fully, whereas Petrarch's petition remains unanswered.<sup>644</sup> The final word of the *Canzoniere* is 'pace', but this is a peace that is desired but not achieved: 'Raccomandami al tuo Figliuol, verace | homo et verace Dio, | ch'accolga 'l mïo spirto ultimo in pace' (*RVF* 366.135-7). Thus, if the final image of Dante's *Commedia* is that of a circle (in which Dante-pilgrim becomes one with both God and Dante-poet), the enduring image of the *Canzoniere* is that of a labyrinth, of a space that is disorientating and inescapable, and the exit of which is desired but unreachable and unlocatable.

The desire to reach the end is explicitly expressed in *RVF* 366, first in the line 'la mia tòrta via drizzi a buon fine' (*RVF* 366.65), and later in the request 'por fine al mio dolore' (*RVF* 366.103). Just as Petrarch's grief is endless, so his writing is an ongoing, unstoppable project. To return to the epigraph to this chapter, Petrarch's melancholia is endless and endlessly fuels his writing, as suggested by the acknowledgement 'Scripsi multa et scribo'. This failure of closure is anticipated much earlier in the collection, for instance in the phrase 'fine non pongo al mio obstinato affanno' (*RVF* 50.52), and recapitulated in another poem towards the end of the *Canzoniere*: 'Et sarebbe ora, et è passata omai, | di rivoltarli [gli occhi], in più sicura parte, | et poner fine a li 'nfiniti guai' (*RVF* 355.9-11). In Petrarch, the endlessness of grief ('affanno' or 'guai') is not only matched and encouraged by but even responsible for the endlessness of writing. As with Proust, so for Petrarch the sublimation achieved

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<sup>644</sup> For a comparison of *Paradiso* XXXIII and *RVF* 366, see Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, 'La preghiera alla Vergine: Dante e Petrarca', *Filologia e critica*, 20 (1995), 365-74. This critic notes the fundamental differences between the two prayers: firstly, that Dante's prayer is mediated by an authoritative, saintly voice and is therefore objective, whereas Petrarch's is trusted to his lyric subject and remains subjective; secondly, that Mary is invoked to allow access to God at the end of the *Commedia*, whereas at the end of the *Canzoniere* she is called upon for her own sake, as an anti-Laura.

through writing is that of an extension and perpetuation of desire and suffering. The achievement of writing is, in short, for each Bersanian rather than Freudian in tenor.

Within this question of the role of writing in Petrarch, it is important to consider the related question of the function of memory. As Aldo Scaglione comments in his assessment of the composition and structure of the *Canzoniere*, ‘la memoria si nutre di se stessa e migliora se stessa e la poesia, infinitamente’; in other words, endless writing relies on endless remembering.<sup>645</sup> Of particular importance in relation to such questions is the image of the book of memory, which I have found to be essential, in different ways, to Dante’s *Vita nuova* and *Commedia* and to Proust’s *Recherche*. Yet, incorporating Petrarch into such a discussion, it is first vital to note that there is, perhaps surprisingly, no equivalent book of memory in Petrarch.<sup>646</sup>

Santagata gives one reason for this omission at the end of his *Dal sonetto al canzoniere*:

Come la lingua, il canzoniere espunge la Storia dai suoi confini, ma nello stesso tempo costruisce una sua storia interna che coincide con la costruzione del personaggio. E tutto ciò senza rompere il cerchio, senza uscire dal territorio: la storia e il personaggio si costruiscono dall’interno grazie all’introduzione di un tempo soggettivo e (quindi) artificiale, il tempo della memoria. Siamo lontani perciò dalla memoria ‘oggettiva’ della *Vita nuova*, strumento euristico di una realtà ad essa esterna, strumento di indagine di un personaggio che non si definisce perché ricorda, perché valuta il ricordo. Il *Canzoniere* non è trascritto dal ‘libro della memoria’ perché è esso stesso quel libro.<sup>647</sup>

In this respect, Petrarchan memory would seem to be closer to Proustian memory in that it is subjective, not objective. Picone, meanwhile, gives a different – and, I find,

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<sup>645</sup> See Aldo Scaglione, ‘La struttura del *Canzoniere* e il metodo di composizione del Petrarca’, *Lettere italiane*, 27:2 (April-June 1975), 129–39 (p. 136).

<sup>646</sup> See Andrea Torre, *Petrarcheschi segni di memoria: Spie, postille, metafore* (Pisa: Edizione della Normale, 2007), pp. 75–208 (especially pp. 273–301 on the image of writing in/on one’s memory). As Torre notes (p. 283), the closest Petrarch gets to a book of memory is the ‘experientie libro’ in the *Secretum* (*Secretum*, p. 160; *MSB*, p. 69).

<sup>647</sup> Marco Santagata, *Dal sonetto al canzoniere: Ricerche sulla preistoria e la costituzione di un genere* (Padua: Liviana Editrice, 1979), p. 166.

more convincing – reason as to why the image of the book is lacking in Petrarch. He argues that this image is absent and instead replaced by metonymical referents such as *carte*, *penne*, *rime*, *note*, or *voci*, in order to respect Petrarch’s sense of an irretrievable loss of unity and of the fragmentation and dissolution of world, self, and text.<sup>648</sup> To borrow Derrida’s terminology, in going from Dante to Petrarch we would then seem to have ‘D’un côté la clôture du livre, de l’autre l’ouverture du texte. D’un côté l’encyclopédie théologique et sur son modèle, le livre de l’homme. De l’autre, un tissu de traces marquant la disparition d’un Dieu excédé ou d’un homme effacé.’<sup>649</sup>

For both Petrarch and Proust, the Dantean book of memory is inaccessible, unreadable, lost, or dispersed. Thus, while Dante claims to be able to rely on a rational, voluntary form of memory in his writing, Petrarch and Proust must instead turn to involuntary memory in order to draw forth remembered fragments from the past. A number of critics have drawn comparisons between particular poems by Petrarch and the Proustian phenomenon of involuntary memory, but they have not explored or questioned such a coincidence further. Stefano Agosti, for instance, cites the final *terzina* of *RVF* 175 (‘et così di lontan m’alluma e ’ncende, | che la memoria ad ognor fresca et salda | pur quel nodo mi mostra e ’l loco e ’l tempo’, vv.12-14) as evidence that as regards involuntary memory, Petrarch got there first:

Basti pensare, in proposito, alla grandiosa fenomenologia di questo tipo di memoria quale risulta messa in atto, capillarmente e nelle strutture portanti, dalla *Recherche* proustiana, tutta fondata sugli oggetti sostitutivi, e di cui viene fornita, lì stesso, la legge generale. Quella legge che è comunque individuata proprio da Petrarca medesimo.<sup>650</sup>

<sup>648</sup> Michelangelo Picone, ‘Petrarca e il libro non finito’, in *Il Canzoniere: Lettura micro e macrotestuale*, pp. 9-23 (p. 19).

<sup>649</sup> *L’Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), p. 429.

<sup>650</sup> Agosti, *Gli occhi le chiome*, p. 47.

Agosti makes a similar comment about *RVF* 196, and in particular the line ‘torsele il tempo poi in più saldi nodi’ (v.12).<sup>651</sup> In this sonnet, ‘L’aura serena’ (v. 1) is the trigger for the lyric subject’s involuntary memory of when he fell in love: ‘fammi risovenir quand’Amor diemme | le prime piaghe’ (vv. 3–4). In a closely related sonnet, *RVF* 194, Gianfranco Contini hears in the first four lines ‘una quartina, per usar la frase proustiana, di *intermittence du coeur* sul solo motivo del ritorno, liricamente autosufficiente’.<sup>652</sup>

The relevant lines read as follows:

L’aura gentil, che rasserena i poggi  
destando i fior’ per questo ombroso bosco,  
al soave suo spirto riconosco,  
per cui conven che ’n pena e ’n fama poggi.

I would add to this that, as in the apparition of the grandmother in Balbec, the consequence of such an involuntary memory is a renewed sense of grief (‘pena’) and loss, unlike the Dantean model of *VN* XXXIX, in which Beatrice’s reappearance guarantees her presence and future reunion.

Finally, Rosanna Bettarini has described the fourth stanza of ‘Chiare, fresche et dolci acque’ as an instance of ‘memoria involontaria’,<sup>653</sup> while Emilio Pasquini, too, describes this same passage as an ‘*intermittence du cœur*’.<sup>654</sup>

Da’ be’ rami scendea  
(dolce ne la memoria)  
una pioggia di fior’ sovra ’l suo grembo;  
et ella si sedea  
humile in tanta gloria,  
coverta già de l’amoroso nembo. (*RVF* 126.40–5)

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<sup>651</sup> ‘Questo purissimo oggetto verbale, equivalente materico dell’oggetto della rappresentazione fantasmatica, assolve alla stessa funzione degli oggetti custodi di sensazioni passate-presenti che, nella *Recherche*, definiscono la fase del “tempo ritrovato”. La treccia-tempo rappresenta la conclusione del tempo come durata e l’inaugurazione del tempo simbolico: quello del legame indissolubile e inalterabile del Soggetto all’oggetto del desiderio’. *Gli occhi le chiome*, p. 14.

<sup>652</sup> Gianfranco Contini, *Variante e altra linguistica*, p. 22.

<sup>653</sup> Rosanna Bettarini, *Lacrime e inchiostro*, p. 20.

<sup>654</sup> Pasquini, ‘Medieval Polarities: Dantism and Petrarchism’, p. 177.

Bettarini concludes:

Petrarca è davvero un moderno. La tela di ragno del *Canzoniere*, dove tratto tratto un'allacciatura può essere sciolta, un nodo slegato, un segmento di tessuto illuminato, in quel particolare e quasi mai nell'insieme, è tutto sommato meno remota dalla grandiosa macchina e dall'assunto poetico della *Recherche* di Proust che da 'poemi' o pseudo-poemi di riconosciuti e magnamini predecessori.<sup>655</sup>

This reliance on involuntary memory as a source of poetry and a perpetuator of emotion means that Petrarch and Proust have a different relationship to *temps perdu* than Dante. In the *Commedia*, there are frequent reminders as to the culpability of 'tempo perduto', such as Virgil's aphoristic "'perder tempo a chi più sa più spiace'" (*Purg.*III.78), Dante's recognition of Virgil's constant chivvying along ('Io era ben del suo ammonir uso | pur di non perder tempo', *Purg.*XII.85-6), or the cry of the purgatorial *accidiosi*: "'Ratto, ratto, che 'l tempo non si perda | per poco amor,'" gridavan li altri appresso, | "che studio di ben far grazia rinverda"' (*Purg.*XVIII.103-5). It is not coincidental that these comments come from *Purgatorio*, which, as the only of the three realms to be set in time, is particularly concerned with good timekeeping. As Forese reminds Dante-pilgrim "'l tempo è caro | in questo regno'" (*Purg.*XXIV.91-2). In this, Dante can be seen to anticipate the increased fear of wasting time which Jacques Le Goff has identified as one consequence of the shift from bell to clock time over the fourteenth century.<sup>656</sup>

In Proust's *Recherche*, however, 'temps perdu' is necessary, in order to create the space for memory, imagination, and creativity to function involuntarily. Only that which has been lost can be imagined, remembered, and desired – 'retrouvé', in short –

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<sup>655</sup> Bettarini, *Lacrime e inchiostro*, p. 137.

<sup>656</sup> See Jacques Le Goff, *Pour un autre Moyen Âge: temps, travail et culture en Occident: 18 essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), pp. 46-65 and pp. 66-79. Le Goff notes that this renewed fear of wasting time is fuelled by the invention and spread of clocks which mean that, unlike seasonal, cyclical, flexible church time, the hours are more able than ever to be calculated and charted according to commercial standards, rendering any time wasted particularly accountable.

and so, as Proust's narrator asserts, 'Les vrais paradis sont les paradis qu'on a perdus' (*ALR* IV:449). Yet against such a model of sublimation in which *temps perdu* is transcended and transformed into *temps retrouvé*, I would place a Bersanian reading that sees *temps perdu* extended and perpetuated, rather than replaced, by *temps retrouvé*. The true regaining of time through writing is therefore deferred to an endless future, sacrificed to the persistence of and fidelity to experience, 'temps perdu'. Moreover, even though time may be partly regained through involuntary memory, Proust takes great pains to stress that this is a temporary, transient experience, and one indeed which – as the 'intermittences du cœur' reveal – brings us back to 'temps perdu'. Thus, remembering the grandmother serves ultimately and paradoxically as a reminder that she is 'perdue pour toujours' in reality, even if she is in another sense destined to be remembered in the protagonist's promised book.

Petrarch's attitude towards *temps perdu* alternates between these two poles. Like Dante, Petrarch at times considers 'perder tempo' to be morally condemnable. The penitential *RVF* 62, for instance, opens with the lament 'Padre del ciel, dopo i perduti giorni' (v.1), and this theme of repentance is reiterated at the end of the *Canzoniere*: 'I vo piangendo i miei passati tempi | i quai posi in amar cosa mortale' (*RVF* 365.1-2). Nonetheless, as for Proust so for Petrarch this same 'tempo passato' is at the same time the source and subject of poetry:

Passato è 'l tempo omai, lasso, che tanto  
con refrigerio in mezzo 'l foco vissi;  
passato è quella di ch'io piansi et scrissi,  
ma lasciato m'à ben la penna e 'l pianto.      (*RVF* 313.1-4)

The plosive alliteration in these lines appropriately connects mortality with writing ('passato', 'penna'), while the inextricability of writing and weeping for Petrarch is

represented by the chiasmus of the balanced pairs ‘piansi et scrissi’ and ‘la penna e ’l pianto’. The adversative conjunction ‘ma’ at the start of line four is reinforced by the homophonous ‘m’à’ in the same line, which seems to emphasise how the lyric subject is alone and at odds with time and the world. Finally, the rhyme of ‘vissi’ and ‘scrissi’ suggests that for Petrarch the two are interdependent, a situation which, as I cited earlier, is reaffirmed in one particular letter to Boccaccio, where Petrarch expresses the wish to continue writing up to the point of death. Like Bersanian sublimation, writing for Petrarch is a part of and a continuation of life, rather than a redemptive but devaluing attempt at transcendence of lived experience. In between the opposing stances of Dante and Proust, Petrarch remains tempted towards an aesthetic revelling in memory and the past yet stung – no doubt by the example of Dante himself – to be suspicious of such backwards-facing obsession.

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Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated the validity and utility of comparative and contrastive textual readings and of the interpretative work of interpolation. I have moved between theory and fiction, between prose and poetry, between psychoanalysis and deconstruction, and between the modern and the medieval, in order to uncover new resonances and redefine our very understanding of what mourning is and how it manifests itself. In this movement backwards and forwards, between texts, I have been faithful to the Barthesian etymology of ‘discourse’ as precisely an act of ‘running to and fro’. From the confrontation of individual writers and theorists – Dante and Freud, Petrarch and Kristeva, Proust and Derrida – and the embracing of the interference of the interloper I have moved towards an evermore dense and intertwined network of references, culminating in an evaluation of the discourses of mourning that are shared by

Dante, Petrarch, and Proust in the second half of Chapter Three, however different their experiences of grief.

Finally, I have found – in this chapter – that the experience of bereavement not only acts as the impetus to the start of writing, as has long been assumed, but also defines and is defined by the end of writing. In this respect, the end of melancholia and the work of mourning discovered in the *Commedia* in Chapter One is here found to be bounded by the poetic closure the text performs. In contrast, the interminability of Petrarchan melancholia and, albeit intermittently, of Proustian ‘demi-deuil’ has been shown to be inextricably linked to the projects of endless writing undertaken by these two writers. In such a reading of the correlation between literary form and emotional content, the distinction between Freudian and Bersanian sublimation has been instrumental in allowing me to reconfigure the relationship between experience (whether desire or grief) and art. In particular, Bersani’s critique of Freudian sublimation allows for a new appreciation of the ethics of incompleteness. From such a perspective Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* enacts not so much a failed conversion as an openness to memory, fidelity to Laura, and self-fulfillment through endless writing and rewriting, while Proust’s *Recherche*, similarly, is the tale not only of a failure to write, but of the necessity of leaving time and space, on the one hand, for involuntary memory to repeat, intermittently and *ad infinitum*, its fragile act of restoration and, on the other, for writing to be maintained in all its untarnished futurity, as a promise. It is surprising and illuminating that in this respect, as in so many others that I have explored throughout this thesis (such as the ambivalent status of the proper name or the mournful mediation of the Virgilian, tragic Orphic myth), Petrarch seems to be closer to Proust than to Dante.

In the end, that these conclusions must remain promises of future research is faithful to the Derridean tenor of much of this thesis as well as to the complexity of the three chosen authors, who – to borrow Proust’s words – ‘on pourrait à l’infini suivre [...] dans leurs coïncidences, leurs diversions, leurs entrecroisements’.<sup>657</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> John Ruskin, *Sésame et les lys*, trans. by Marcel Proust, ed. by Antoine Compagnon (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1987), p. 128 (Proust’s footnote).

## Bibliography.

N.B. The Bibliography is arranged according to the following divisions: Primary texts; Dictionaries and encyclopedias; Secondary criticism on Dante; Secondary criticism on Petrarch; Secondary criticism on Proust; Secondary criticism on Dante and Petrarch; Secondary criticism on Dante and Proust; Key psychoanalytical and theoretical texts; Secondary criticism on mourning, melancholy, and melancholia; Secondary literature on medieval theories and practices; Other theoretical and critical texts cited.

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