

## AISTĖ KILTINAVIČIŪTĖ

### RAPTURE AND VISIONARY VIOLENCE IN DANTE'S *PURGATORIO* 9\*

**Abstract:** This article argues that the representation of Dante's dream in *Purgatorio* 9 is indebted to the depiction of rapture in Virgil's and Ovid's stories of Ganymede, but also outdoes them by registering the inwardness and sensory reactions of the raptured. In rewriting his classical models, Dante implicitly invokes Saint Paul as an authority on what it feels like to be raptured, allowing the poet to valorise the vulnerability of the visionary body and the cognitive uncertainty when confronted with mystical experiences. Finally, the article outlines the implications of rapture represented in *Purgatorio* 9 for the *Commedia* as a whole: the dream leads the pilgrim towards a more profound appreciation of how an individual can participate in the universal bonds of desire that, in Dante's understanding, order and regulate the world.

**Keywords:** Dante, dream, *raptus*, rapture, *Purgatorio*, Saint Paul, Ganymede, Ovid, Virgil.

#### Introduction

Dedicated entirely to the pilgrim's transition from the Ante-Purgatory to Purgatory proper ("Tu se' omai al purgatorio giunto," *Purg.* 9.49), *Purgatorio* 9 begins with a reminder that Dante, like Aeneas and Saint Paul, is present in the "immortale secolo" with his senses ("sensibilmente," *Inf.* 2.14-15).<sup>1</sup> By the opening of *Purgatorio* 9, the pilgrim's physical body has tired ("vinto dal sonno," 9.11).<sup>2</sup> So he reclines wearily on the grass of the so-called Valley of the Princes and falls asleep. After suggesting that his experience should be seen in the context of the expanded powers of the mind during prophetic early morning visions ("la

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\* My thanks go to the editors of the 2021 issue of *Annali d'Italianistica*, especially Heather Webb and Giuseppe Ledda, who were exposed to many iterations of this article in its less articulate forms. I am grateful to my hosts and academic grandfathers at Stanford University, Robert P. Harrison and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, who created the conditions for me to write the majority of this article under the celestial light illuminating the Green Library in between equally enlightening visits to Sultana. I also want to thank Anna Gabriella Chisena, Juan Varela-Portas de Orduña, Paola Tricomi, and other participants of the Alma Dante 2020 seminar at the Università di Bologna, Dipartimento di Filologia Classica e Italianistica (23-25 June 2020), whose insightful comments helped to improve this article.

<sup>1</sup> The word *sensibilmente* "[q]ualifica un verbo che denoti un'azione dei sensi, o rientrando comunque nell'ambito della sensibilità" ("sensibilmente," *Enciclopedia Dantesca*). While the notion of Saint Paul as Dante's model will be explored in detail in this article, for the parallel with Aeneas, see Kevin Brownlee, "Dante, Beatrice, and the Two Departures from Dido"; Carolyn Lund-Mead; and Kay.

<sup>2</sup> The Italian text of Dante's *Commedia* quoted in this work is the Giorgio Petrocchi edition.