DANTE'S WINEMAKING *HAPAX LEGOMENA*: TEXTUAL AND THEOLOGICAL LABOUR IN THE *COMMEDIA*

GEORGE RAYSON (University of Cambridge)

Whether as Eucharistic symbol, the result of a miracle, or as a means of heavenly inebriation, the theological significance of wine is self-evident. As Piero Boitani writes, it 'needs no Cicero or medieval philosopher to explain it: the nous of a farmer will do just as well—or, equally, the biblical knowledge of the average Christian'.[1] Dante invokes the theologically inflected language of winemaking on several key occasions in the *Commedia*, particularly in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. In this note I will discuss passages in *Purgatorio* IV and *Paradiso* XII which refer to winemaking, focusing in particular on the significance in each instance of Dante's choice to deploy *hapax legomena*, words which occur only once within the poem.[2] I will show that, far from merely alluding to the promises of salvation through implicit biblical allusion, Dante's winemaking *hapax*, the result of stringent attention combined with judicious restraint, in fact perform the work of its very enaction.

PURGATORIO IV: 'IMPRUNA', 'FORCATELLA', 'UVA', 'IMBRUNA'

In *Purgatorio* IV, on their difficult ascent towards the gate of Purgatory, the pilgrim and his guide arrive at a steep and narrow opening in the rock, narrower than the gap in a hedge which a farmer might fill with thorns to stop potential thieves from stealing newly ripened grapes:

> Maggiore aperta molte volte impruna
> con una forcatella di sue spine
> l'uom de la villa quando l'uva imbruna,

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[1] Piero Boitani, 'The Poetry and Poetics of the Creation', in *Dante's 'Commedia': Theology as Poetry*, ed. by Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne, The William and Katherine Devers Series in Dante Studies, 11 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), pp. 95–130 (p. 106).

[2] I follow the definition of *hapax legomena* used by Robert Hollander in 'An Index of Hapax Legomena in Dante's *Commedia*', *Dante Studies*, 106 (1988), 81–110, which will be my authority for citing a word as a *hapax*. On *hapax* in the *Commedia*, see also Riccardo Viel, *'Quella materia ond'io son fatto scriba': Hapax e prime attestazioni della 'Commedia'*, Mele cotogne (Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia, 2018); Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 215; and Ronald L. Martinez, 'Dante and the Poem of the Liturgy', in *Reviewing Dante's Theology*, ed. by Claire E. Honess and Matthew Treherne, 2 vols (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), II, 89–155 (p. 106).

> che non era la calla onde salìne
> lo duca mio, e io appresso, soli,
> come da noi la schiera si partìne.[3]

(*Purg*. IV, 19–24)

Many commentators, first among them Carlo Steiner, have drawn attention to the conspicuous echo of Matthew 7.14 ('For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it') in Dante's pseudosimile, with its obvious relevance to the pilgrim's incipient purgative journey.[4] Nicola Fosca, citing the eighteenth-century Jesuit Pompeo Venturi, adds to this a possible reference to Proverbs 15.19 ('The way of the lazy is overgrown with thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway').[5] This latter reference, though less often cited, is particularly pertinent to the passage, especially in consideration of the fact that the narrow path leads eventually to a group of souls usually referred to by anglophone critics as the 'late-penitent', who delayed their repentance until the last possible moment and so must wait outside the gate of Purgatory for as long as they lived in contumacy on earth, unless aided by the prayers of the living. To reach their waiting place, these indolent souls must travel up through a path which, in the vehicle of Dante's pseudosimile at least, is full of thorns.

Dante's 'homely comparison [...] rich with biblical resonances' is also an island of singular usages in a *canto* relatively poor in lexical diversity; the opening *terzina* (lines 19–21) contains a cluster of four *hapax legomena*, the first of the canto and the last for twenty-nine lines: 'impruna', 'forcatella', 'uva', and 'imbruna'.[6] Dante's description of a difficult and constricted topography, itself already rich with biblical metaphors, is thus expressed, appropriately enough, through highly constricted language, all drawn from the language of winemaking. As the late fourteenth-century commentator Benvenuto da Imola writes, this 'primus ingressus montis' (first entrance to the mountain) is 'difficilior *sine comparatione*' (very difficult, *without comparison* [my emphasis]), a remark which could apply equally well to Dante's lexical choices.[7] The use of *hapax* in the passage forces the reader to streamline their reading away from the plurality of comparison and towards a singular focus on the words themselves, equivalent to Virgil and the pilgrim being forced into single file by the narrowness of the path.

In the *Ars poetica*, one of the most widely read classical treatises on poetics in the Middle Ages, Horace describes the writing of poetry as 'limae labor et mora' (the toil and tedium of the file), a characterization borrowed from the language of sculpture

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[3] All quotations from the *Commedia* are taken from *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi, Le Opere di Dante Alighieri, Edizione Nazionale a cura della Società Dantesca Italiana, 7, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67).

[4] Carlo Steiner, commentary to *Purg*. IV, 19–21, accessed via the *Dartmouth Dante Project* [henceforth *DDP*], <http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/reader>. All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

[5] Nicola Fosca, commentary to *Purgatorio* IV, 19–24 (*DDP*).

[6] *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling, introduction and notes by Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996–2011), II, p. 73.

[7] Benvenuto da Imola, commentary to *Purg*. IV, 19–24 (*DDP*).

which holds a particular relevance for the restrictive, filed down poetics of the *hapax*.[8] In the context of Dante's *Purgatorio*, the *limae labor* of the *hapax* is also linked to a specifically Christian system of ethics which informs Purgatory's landscape, as evidenced by the 'calla' of *Purgatorio* IV discussed above. The penitent soul undergoing purgation is included in the generosity of the language's intelligibility, but is also filed down to their own specific, singular path to God. The message for the penitent (and for readers) is clear: recognize the generous bounty of God's forgiveness but remain single-minded in pursuing salvation.

The *impruna–imbruna* rhyme in *Purgatorio* IV brings together in near-equivalence the workings of a human labourer (the farmer who 'impruna') and a divine *artifex* (seen in the grape which, through natural processes, 'imbruna'). The positioning of 'impruna' before 'imbruna' suggests that the latter could be a riff on the former, where divine operations in nature (i.e. the ripening of the grape) are cast as the work of a labourer. This mechanical framing of the universe provides the metaphysical backdrop to the materially enacted playfulness of linking two very similar words in a near *rima equivoca*. Providing a tonic to the *limae labor*, these *hapax* evince generosity in their vivid intelligibility as they reveal the joy that can be found in lexical choices made materially active. As the *terzina* ends, the poet chooses to place two *hapax* side by side, 'l'uva imbruna', likely selecting 'uva' rather than 'vite' (used on two other occasions in the poem, *Purg.* XXV, 78 and *Par.* XXIV, 111) precisely because of its phonic qualities, its *-u-a-* assonance with 'imbruna'. This sound pattern binds the two *hapax* together and demonstrates that the selection of a *hapax*, ahead of any of its synonyms, is based primarily on its phonic qualities. The duality of the *hapax*, its filing down and reaching out, is further evident in the rhyme *-una*. The rhyme *una–impruna–imbruna* (lines 17, 19, 21) includes what Joan Ferrante calls a 'core rhyme', i.e. the presence of one rhyme word within another, in this case 'una'.[9] On the one hand, the presence of 'una' in the two *hapax* highlights their uniqueness. On the other hand, 'una' is used earlier, in lines 17–18, to describe the communal—and therefore necessarily plural—cry of the excommunicated souls announcing the location of the pathway: 'venimmo ove quell' anime ad una | gridaro a noi: "Qui è vostro dimando"'. The doubleness in the semantic field of 'singularity', where it is both a means of differentiation and a *telos* of unification, is therefore performed by these *hapax* in rhyme. They are words which say 'una' and are singular, and they are words which say 'una' and perform unification. The text thus enacts the specified, individual, and continually worked process of salvation which underwrites the *Purgatorio*.

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[8] Horace, *Ars poetica*, line 291; in *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library, 194 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926, rev. and repr. 1929), pp. 474–75. On the Horatian legacy in the Middle Ages with respect to Dante, see Ronald L. Martinez, 'Rhetoric, Literary Theory, and Practical Criticism', in *Dante in Context*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 277–96 (pp. 287–91).

[9] Joan Ferrante, 'A Poetics of Chaos and Harmony', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 181–200 (p. 192).

PARADISO XII: 'AGRICOLA', 'GROMMA'

The shift from *Purgatorio* to *Paradiso* entails a shift away from direct physical contact with the generated world; the winemaking language of *Paradiso* must therefore move from the cultivated processes of growth and maturity to the theological labour of subject-making. In Saint Bonaventure's praise of Saint Dominic, which occupies the majority of *Paradiso* XII, Dominic is described as an 'agricola' (*Par.* XII, 71). This is a *hapax* in the poem and is clearly lifted from John 15.1: 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower ['agricola' in the Vulgate].' As a *hapax*, the word 'agricola' is specifically tailored in its application in the poem to Dominic, singularizing his divine status through a name which, however unique in the *Commedia*, is shared with God the Father in the Bible. Where the biblical intertext allows for the fashioning, through *hapax*, of the penitent subject in *Purgatorio* IV, the *hapax* here in *Paradiso* allows for a shared identity of Dominic with the Father in a lexical performance of divine subjectivity. The union of human and divine labourer is no longer deferred, no longer a process of maturation, but is immediately apparent.

Having finished his praise of Dominic, Bonaventure turns to a condemnation of the contemporary Franciscan orders, drawing on yet more viticultural language:

> Se tal fu l'una rota de la biga
> in che la Santa Chiesa si difese
> e vinse in campo la sua civil briga,
>   ben ti dovrebbe assai esser palese
> l'eccellenza de l'altra, di cui Tomma
> dinanzi al mio venir fu sì cortese.
>   Ma l'orbita che fé la parte somma
> di sua circunferenza, è derelitta,
> sì ch'è la muffa dov' era la gromma.

<div align="right">(Par. XII, 106–14)</div>

The excellence of Francis, attested by Thomas Aquinas in the previous canto, has withered. Now where there was 'gromma', there is 'muffa', where there was the crust which gives wine its flavour, there is mould. 'Gromma' is also a *hapax* in the *Commedia*, and the *-omma* rhyme is also unique in the poem. It is safe to assume that, as Riccardo Viel argues for the verbal form 'grommate' at *Inf.* XVIII, 106, the noun 'gromma' is a word from a demotic language of working people.[10] The presence of 'gromma' in rhyme position enhances its physical, phonic characteristics, which bespeak a colloquial history of usage and enhance its status as 'other' to a literary 'vulgare illustre'. Reciprocally, this otherness acts to singularize the rhyme pattern. The singularity of the *-omma* rhyme scheme, exemplified by 'gromma', is therefore the product of deliberate lexical selection and concatenation, and of the phonic qualities baked into the word's very texture. The rhyming *hapax* is a product of deliberate choice and is also partly arbitrary.

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[10] Viel, p. 86.

The poetic *limae labor* exemplified by the *hapax* must reckon with what is outside of the control of the poetic labourer. And in the instance of the historical reality accessed by 'gromma', the vintner has little to no control over the natural fermentation of the wine, as the vineyard labourer has no control over the maturation of the grape, other than the crude imposition of thorns to prevent thieves. The labour which allows the 'gromma' to be gained is rather subtler, even if operating on the same principle that the human hand cannot affect natural process as a natural agent, only intervene in it as a human agent. But the work which would give 'gromma' rather than 'muffa' is particular to poetic labour, and pertinent to the type of working self which is curated in the *Paradiso*. The work of ensuring there is 'gromma' rather than 'muffa' is a work of patient acceptance, while remaining ready to intervene at the crucial moment. The *-omma* rhyme can be seen as one such specific intervention, one which entails the poet's acceptance of the scarcity of the rhyme words, thus yielding to the extreme arbitrariness that allows them to rhyme together. Such attentiveness is evidently lacking in the contemporary Franciscan orders, meaning the *-omma* rhymes not only describe the problem but also perform its solution.

The temporal distinction between the labour that allows the production of wine from grape, and that which goes into the development of its flavour maps onto the distinction between Purgatory and Paradise as realms which respectively pre- and post-date the Eschaton. But in a realm where all the souls are already saved, there remains a question over where labour is directed in *Paradiso*. Because the *limae labor* of the *hapax* is highly metapoetic, the labour of *Paradiso* could be seen to be directed towards itself, to the curation of its own meanings. According to Ronald L. Martinez, Bernard's use of the word 'punto' in *Paradiso* XXXII is metatextual as both a 'point' of the text, and a tailor's stitch. Martinez argues that Bernard's use of 'punto' places a 'self-referential or metapoetic emphasis on the formal articulation of Dante's text, that is, of the *forma tractatus* of the *Commedia*, divided into *cantiche*, *canti*, and *terzine*'.[11] In effect, the temporal collapse into a point, which is both beginning and end, achieves textually what the Empyrean does metaphysically. As the latter 'contains the whole universe' such that 'panoramic looks within it are in effect comprehensive of the creation', the singular textual points, *hapax*, are 'comprehensive' of the entirety of the textual creation that is the *Commedia*.[12] Singular usages reflect on this singular poetic act because, in much the same way that a *hapax* is effectively irreducible, so the poem, as with any poem, cannot have its individual elements altered without altering its unique character. It is in the Empyrean where the work of the text approaches nearer than ever the divine work described, where Dante deploys a 'strategy of jumping textuality which exemplifies rather than explains' and his poetic work becomes most strikingly performative.[13] But it is only at the poem's end, the climax of its diegetic

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[11] Ronald L. Martinez, 'Dante "buon sartore" (*Paradiso* 32.140): Textile Arts, Rhetoric, and Metapoetics at the End of the *Commedia*', *Dante Studies*, 136 (2018), 22–61 (pp. 26–27).

[12] Ibid., p. 44.

[13] Sara Fortuna and Manuele Gragnolati, 'Dante After Wittgenstein: "Aspetto", Language, and Subjectivity from *Convivio* to *Paradiso*', in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, ed. by Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gragnolati, and Jürgen Trabant (London: Legenda, 2010), pp. 223–47 (p. 239). See also Barolini, *Undivine Comedy*, on the unique 'lyrical or antinarrative mode' (p. 221) of these final cantos.

progression, that a retrospective glance can achieve what *hapax* do throughout the poem. As the Empyrean contains the entirety of creation, the fruits of divine labour, so each *hapax* contains the fruits of poetic labour, the singular text.

CONCLUSION

Hapax legomena are metonymies for the creative act of bringing into being through language itself, the spark of singularity behind poetic creation. There is perhaps no more effective means that the text has at its disposal for representing its own singularity than the *hapax*. The paradigm which they present for the curation of self within the temporality of salvation is fundamentally metatextual. The winemaking *hapax* of *Purgatorio* IV advocate a model for self-preparation for salvation through a single-minded focus on one's own relationship with God, which remains open to his unbounded potential for forgiveness. But this also reflects on the specific modality of *Purgatorio*'s labour, the work through which the text prepares both pilgrim and reader for salvation. Then, in *Paradiso* XII, the model is of the soul yielding to that which is outside its command while remaining attentive, ready to intervene at the right moment, something which is instantiated in the rare *-omma* rhyme. The continual curation of self, implicit behind any model of labour which is applied to *Paradiso*, is also an issue of the text and its unfolding through time. The souls as represented in *Paradiso* have already achieved perfection. But then, significantly, *hapax legomena* operate outside temporally defined boundaries insofar as any one *hapax*, I argue, can represent the textual whole. Perhaps it is in this teleological denial that the *hapax* is the best representative of the text, as a disinterested, playful articulation which takes joy in its lexical choices.