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Borders, Motion, and Excess in Dante's *Commedia*

Analyses of Dante's historical and cultural context have long dominated the scholarly discourse surrounding the *Commedia Divina*. Critical appraisal of Dante's theological influences, political climate, and poetic tradition has enriched our understanding of his poetry, expanding our perspective on the inclusive nature of his vision. These formal taxonomies provide a necessary foundation for re-interpreting the text in ways meaningful for a modern audience. By re-envisioning the *Commedia* in terms of movement, community, and *caritas* (divine love), one can construct a reading of Dante's work using new terminology that fits the discourse rooted in medieval philosophic tradition. The fundamental concerns in the *Commedia* are not unique to Dante's particular time and place: the medieval philosophy that Dante appropriates in his work is but one piece of a long discursive tradition of important human concerns regarding the self, the other, and the divine.

The *Commedia* simultaneously reinforces borders and transitions through them. The *Commedia* calls into question the discrete nature of self, other, and divine. The self is no longer autonomous but rather is dependent upon the other to constitute his/her being: self and other are thus contingent upon each other. Both self and other are also contingent upon the divine, that which defies limitation and containment. Though the Christian afterlife presented in the *Commedia* is compartmentalized according to one's sin and/or participation in the divine good, Dante, as the protagonist, transitions through the circles of Hell, the terraces of Purgatory, and

the spheres of Paradise, necessarily moving through his divinely-inspired pilgrimage. Different degrees of motion exist within the poetic of movement created in the *Commedia*. The punishments meted out in Hell embody two kinds of movement: purposeless movement and physical activity, and the lack of motion, or stasis. The punishments given to those in Hell fit into a schema of movement. In the second circle of Hell, Dante encounters Paulo and Francesca, who are forever condemned to being whirled about without direction in a dark, stormy wind. In this level of Hell, the level for the lustful, there is still a great deal of movement as the "wind propel[s] the evil spirits:/now here, then there, and up and down" as the spirits are "carried along by the battling winds" (1.5.42-44, 49). In the eighth partition of the eighth circle of Hell, the place for deceivers, Ulysses and Diomed are eternally confined to the flame of one stationary fire. In the ninth and final circle of Hell, the sinners are confined to icy encapsulation. The oscillation between movement and the occasional stasis illustrated in the *Purgatorio* manifests the overflow and excess that cannot be physically contained within any one material singularity. Motion in Purgatory is directed movement toward the divine as the souls climb Mount Purgatory in order to perfect their wills and rid themselves of the sin they incurred during their lifetimes.

In Purgatory, every movement has a purpose: the souls in Purgatory participate in a movement toward the divine as their souls become purified and more perfectly aligned with the will of God. Unlike the motion in Hell, the motion in Purgatory is not incessant. With the exception of those purging sloth, the souls in Purgatory rest at night and are given a respite from the painful purgation of the day. Their human wills, like Dante's, are not yet perfected to the point of transcending the physical limitations of the body. Though their bodies are no longer

capable of dying, the souls' time in Purgatory is limited to a finite duration. Because the bodies are not yet fully purified, they still have the limitations of their corporeality and thus must predictably rest while still subject to a realm of temporality. These bodies do have the grace of rest. However, though the rest is understood from a human perspective as a respite from the punishment that Purgatory necessitates, the very nature of resting is not that which is embodied in the divine realm of Paradise. The souls are not yet able to abandon their own wills, but they still participate in the community of longing for the divine. Paradise is characterized by motion and transcendence, as the image of God is of love in motion, culminating as Dante "[feels] [his] will and [his] desire impelled/by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars" (3.33.144-145). As such, Paradise represents excess as it embodies activity and movement as the souls participate in the divine good and are no longer hindered by their corporeality or their imperfect wills; rather, they have transcended themselves and their corporeal bodies to participate in the holy realm of Paradise.

Of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, only Purgatory is a temporal realm in which the occupants progress toward another realm, Heaven. Purgatory is a restorative state, but the bodies of the souls are still hindered by human time. The temporality of Purgatory places it between the eternal states of Hell and Heaven, as its inhabitants are not permanent residents. The divine grace that allows for the opportunity of purgation and purification within the Christian system facilitates Dante's progress on his journey through Purgatory and allows souls to come ever closer to communion with God. The souls in Purgatory are part of a community of longing for the divine, the holy other, that which manifests and exposes their limit, their finitude. Like Purgatory, Dante's Eden is a physical, temporal state, in existence only so long as

time exists. In Dante's sojourn through Eden, he exists in the liminal or in-between space between Purgatory and Heaven, in a waiting area before he may cross the border dividing humanity from divinity to enter the presence of the divine. Purgatory and Eden's liminality as temporal, physical localities suggests the possibility and even necessity of transcending borders in the Christian afterlife, because they are the geographical terrains crossed and overcome in the soul's passage into heaven. In Purgatory, the souls are still bound by physical and temporal limitations as they yearn for heaven: these boundaries intensify the desire for heaven. As the souls long constantly for the divine and make their way slowly up Mount Purgatory, they progress on their spiritual journey that culminates in participation in God's manifold glory. The transitions through the different terraces of Purgatory, and the consistent motion toward the spiritual 'home' or place of emanation, are inherently part of those experiences illustrating the otherness of the divine as Dante is drawn out of himself and out of language in these transitions facilitated through *caritas*. Traditionally, *caritas* has been translated either as "charity" or "love" in English, and the term is applied to love specifically as it relates to generous, selfless love of and from God. For Dante, the movement involved in crossing borders and the physical and emotional longing for that which is beyond the self is the poetic correlative of escaping physical, bodily boundaries.

The ideas of movement, community, and *caritas* prevail in medieval theological writings. Boethius, for one, discusses in his famous *Consolation of Philosophy* the transitional movement of Fortune. Though Boethius initially sees transition and the decline of his social circumstances as unjust punishment, his guide, Lady Philosophy, explains that this transition only appears to Boethius to be negative because he does not understand the entirety of the

divine plan; by virtue of his humanity, Boethius is incapable of knowing divine thought: "Reason is characteristic of the human race alone, just as pure intelligence belongs to God alone" (Boethius 113). Similarly, Dante does not initially understand why those in Hell must be so severely punished, and he pities them (1.6.140). However, Dante moves closer throughout his pilgrimage to a more perfect alignment with the divine will as he progresses throughout the *Commedia*. Ultimately, Dante accepts that his own knowledge and human reason are powerless and incompetent means of understanding the perfection of God's omniscience. After he comes to this realization, Dante is then able to embrace the longing and further participate in the active glory of God manifested by the ever-turning wheel of love (3.33.143, 145). Dante's understanding comes when Beatrice tells him that the reason her words "fly/so high above [his] mind" (2.33.82-83) is so "that [he] may see that mankind's ways/are just as far away from those divine/as earth is from the highest spinning sphere" (2.33.88-90). Dante echoes Boethius' idea of humanity's utter separation from God, and he applies Boethius' idea of transition as he describes human nature through the voice of Beatrice. Just as Lady Philosophy explains the perfection of the universe to Boethius by appealing to humanity's inability to comprehend God's perfect plan, so too does Beatrice explain the ineptitude of human reason to understand divine ways to Dante. From a Christian theological viewpoint, human nature is necessarily transitory because of humanity's fallen state, and therefore one must work toward an understanding of the divine will, yearning for it but never fully obtaining it in the human state. As Beatrice explains to Dante, he has sunk to such sinful depths that "there was no other way to save his soul/except to have him see the Damned in Hell" (2.30.137-138). In this explanation, Beatrice intimates that like all humans, Dante is incapable of having perfect will and that human

nature is not perfectly fixed on the divine will and plan. Despite all of her hopes that he would remain faithful to her and seek the divine goodness she represents, Beatrice knows that Dante as a human being is incapable of perfect fidelity and thus must always be in transition as a movement back toward that which his soul in its purified form most ardently seeks.

Georges Bataille's thinking reformulates Boethius' ideas on transition from a contemporary perspective. Bataille understands transitions as constantly in the process of expenditure. In fact, expenditure is the means through which transition can be understood. For Bataille, expenditure is sacrifice. Through sacrifice, humans are able to become more aligned with the divine. Dante demonstrates this kind of sacrifice as he climbs Mount Purgatory and sheds his sin by more and more renouncing his selfhood and his autonomy. This glorious expenditure is what Bataille calls luxury. Material things, including the human being as 'self,' are sacrificed in light of the excess, for "energy is always in excess; the question is always posed in terms of extravagance….it is to the *particular* living being, or to limited populations of living beings, that the problem of necessity presents itself" (Bataille 23-original emphasis). Bataille notes that traditionally a relationship between a person and another entity (whether person, nature, or God) is formed through a reciprocal relation, but he argues that in fact reciprocity and measured systematization is not a realistic portrayal of life. Individual autonomy is an illusion: humans are not mechanized, and human relationships are not systematic particularities in social exchange. Human beings instead are constituted through others: human existence demands human interaction in a community. Theologically, humanity is utterly and completely dependent upon God for existence. Only in acknowledging that dependence can one renounce the illusion of self-autonomy and participate fully in the otherness of the divine.

Bataille claims that "the severity of *our will* is what makes us tremble" (34), that our belief in self-immanence in fact causes fear because we believe ourselves solely responsible for our lives. Bataille maintains, "Anguish is meaningless for someone who overflows with life, and for life as a whole, which is an overflowing by its very nature" (39-original emphasis). Humans are anxious about the future because they rely on their own powers as individuals to maintain themselves rather than accepting the inevitable need for expenditure of the self.

Bataille's ideas regarding sacrifice and excess draw upon both Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventura's writings that claim when one is furthest from the material, physical self, one is paradoxically closest to God. Bernard and Bonaventura's writings on this topic stem from the biblical teaching, "One does not live by bread alone" (Matthew 4:4). Both Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventura uphold the Christian idea of giving one's life over to God, an idea Bataille appropriates with his theory of (self) sacrifice. They advocate the sacred debasement of the human being: men and women can only sacrifice that which has been given to them through God's grace or that which was acquired sinfully (i.e. that which was acquired counter to God's will). As such, they promote the sacrifice and expenditure of the selfish, prideful human will so that people may instead be (re)aligned with the divine will. Such alignment is a constant process in which one is always in transition. The human will is that which is imperfect and causes misconceptions. People believe that they must work in order to obtain the resource to exchange for material wealth. This system becomes nothing more than an economic exchange grounded in the artifice of material productivity wherein people forget the divine nature of God's love for humanity. Anxiety regarding one's self-preservation disallows one's ability to move beyond the physical realm of humanity and truly appreciate God's gift and grace. Bataille critiques this idea

of self-preservation, saying that expenditure of the self is inevitable: "of all conceivable luxuries, death, in its fatal and inexorable form, is undoubtedly the most costly" (34). Bataille speaks directly to Dante's situation in the *Commedia*: though Dante does not physically die in the course of his vision, he does metaphorically participate in the death of his own human will. Throughout the *Purgatorio*, Dante is constantly in transition, or a state of expenditure, as he moves up the mountain, and his will becomes more perfected, more aligned with the divine will. Dante must expend himself, sacrifice his selfhood, and renounce his own will in order to eventually be accepted in the realm of the heavenly spheres of Paradise.

The insignificance of the individual human that Bataille appropriates from Christian treatises also has grounding in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventura. Both Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventura emphasize humanity's depravity as a result of Original Sin. Bernard espouses the idea that man's ultimate purpose is to recognize divine truth. As one contemporary commentator paraphrases Bernard's ideas, "To [recognize truth as God] [man] must be aware that his relationship with God is based on need. The obstacle to the relationship is pride; the remedy is humility. Grace is the condition for meeting God in Christ" (Leclercq 38). According to Bernard, then, with human admission of depravity comes the ability to be reconciled with God. Because the divine is in excess of the human experience, it can never be compartmentalized within the human system of containment. Paradoxically, only in the awareness of the repugnant condition of humanity and human distance from God do humans come closest to communion with God, closest to being aware of the divine, that which exists outside the limits of the system. As Bataille states this idea, "*particular* existence always risks succumbing for lack of resources. It contrasts with *general* existence whose resources are in

excess and for which death has no meaning" (39). The sacrifice of the self, who believes in the supremacy of his or her own understanding, is thus an act of humility and piety. The soul comes to participate in the divine order and to acknowledge its own insignificance. Bonaventura shares these ideas of self-obliteration and destruction, saying, "for transcending yourself and all things, by the immeasurable and absolute ecstasy of a pure mind, leaving behind all things and freed from all things, you will ascend to the superessential ray of the divine darkness" (Bonaventura 115). With this metaphysically philosophical view, the self is not important or significant in comparison with the divine: the self is a material 'thing' that is to be transcended in order to achieve joyous communion with God. As the self becomes less important, it is more easily expended, and with the acknowledgment of the corporeal and identified self's superfluity, the anxieties that come with preservation similarly disappear. Once one's knowledge is directed toward the divine rather than toward earthly, material things, the expenditure of the self and material, physical entities becomes not only acceptable, but encouraged. As Bataille says, "the luxury of death is…first as a negation of ourselves, then – in a sudden reversal –…the profound truth of that movement of which life is the manifestation" (34-35). This approach to life transcends material, human concerns and is intimately connected with a greater purpose that is consciously aligned with the divine will. Lacking anxiety about the past or the future, Bataille's theory of expenditure implies a world in which movement is always enacted in a spirit of expenditure toward the perfection of something greater, achieved through the material self's destruction. The individual is always moving away from the self to reach for the divine, that which is outside the artificial and limited order of material things. In this way, Bataille's conception of excess through expenditure reinterprets medieval understandings of transition as

an ever-present moment in which movement toward that which is holy is eternal. Such movement demands a recollection of the past only insofar as that past is rejected as only a recollection of an imperfect will that is in the present always being purified and thus engaging in an eternal yearning toward the divine. This consistent yearning suggests that the expenditure and denouncement of the self is movement from an artificially systematic humanity to the realm of the unpredictable, un-conceivable other, the divine.

Denouncing the self in favor of something greater makes community an important aspect of medieval Christianity. In Dante's time, the idea of a community of believers and of the Christian Church as a community prevailed using the biblical reference in which Jesus proclaims, "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20). The communal nature of the Christian doctrine centers on the figure of Jesus as God in human form, who became the sacrificial savior. The philosophy of the Gospel of John is at the heart of Christian community: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). Divine love is thus the cornerstone of Christianity. Christian doctrine dictates that all should believe in the good news that focuses on God's love for humanity in the form of *caritas*, a concept enthusiastically advocated by the evangelical apostle Paul. In one of the most famous biblical passages, Paul dedicates an entire chapter to love (*caritas*), most notably concluding, "faith, hope, and love [*caritas*] abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). Medieval theologians embraced this idea of *caritas* and continued to define it as a fundamental aspect of Christian faith. *Caritas* goes beyond the normal connotations of love as a modern audience might first understand it. Rooted in the Greek term *charis* (grace), *caritas*

guides the human being toward the divine throughout life. *Caritas* is the outpouring of love and kindness for others born of selfless generosity. According to medieval Christian theology, it was out of this *caritas*, this divine love and grace for humanity, that Jesus came into the world and died for the sins of God's people. Bernard of Clairvaux describes *caritas* as "an affection…given freely; it makes us spontaneous. True love [*caritas*] is content. It has its reward in what it loves" (Bernard of Clairvaux 187). *Caritas*, then, is found in the community of human beings who participate in the love of God by acknowledging the godliness in each and every human being. There is humility in admitting the need for another person, because it indicates the absence of one's complete pride in his or her own immanence: through the sacrifice of the individual, the community that supersedes the individuated self is formed. Therefore, *caritas* defines the paradoxical forces of both compulsion and completion. God is the pinnacle of completion that is never and can never be fully achieved, but the striving for the divine through and because of *caritas* is itself a manifestation of God's love. There is no end to excess because by definition, excess can never be fully completed. In this way, *caritas* can be understood as the ultimate sacrifice and self-obliteration, the joyful expenditure of the self as it "[detaches] from the *real* order, from the poverty of *things*, and…[restores] the *divine* order" (57). *Caritas* is at the heart of Christian community in the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*: *caritas* drives humans to sacrifice because of the grace and mercy God has given them.

Jean-Luc Nancy reinterprets Christian community in terms of the self and the other, and the coming together of these two perceived separate entities in community. This coming together is the place in which community as well as the self and the other exist in relation to one another but can never be completed. Nancy articulates in modern terms what has been at the

base of Christian community for over two thousand years: he argues that the individual is defined and constituted in, through, and against other human beings. This definition, this differencing of one from another, is a result of human finitude. Limited physically by corporeal bodies and mentally by the inability to fully know everything, human beings must come into community with one another as social creatures whose very self-definition is dependent upon an outside entity. Here, Bataille's influence on Nancy's philosophical thought is manifested. Nancy expands upon Bataille's assertion that "man is in search of a lost intimacy" (57). In the creation of community, the self is repudiated in favor of the other. Though Nancy often focuses on the creation of community between two selves, he explicitly acknowledges that "the true consciousness of the loss of community is Christian" (10). This loss of community comes from the fall of humanity commonly referred to as Original Sin. Once Adam and Eve forsake God's commandment and God evicts them from the Garden of Eden, humanity's communion with the divine is destroyed; the eternal longing for God is born in the wake of humanity's sudden, mistaken awareness of the self that necessarily creates an awareness of God as other. Due to the impossibility of communion with the divine in the fallen human state, *caritas* describes everyone's ultimate natural desire and longing to be with the divine. Bernard expounds upon the idea of eternal yearning as he says, "you are always restlessly sighing after what is missing" (188). In the wake of man's expulsion from Eden, the community with the divine is that which is missing. Human beings long constantly for that pre-sinful state in which men and women could commune with God and were not concerned with their own immanence. Bernard further notes that true *caritas* proceeds from "a pure heart, a good conscience, unfeigned faith, by which we love our neighbor's good as our own. For he who loves himself most, or solely, does

not love the good purely, because he loves it for his sake, not for its own" (200). As such, one should not attempt to homogenize love to serve one's own purpose, but should instead love for the greater purpose of creating community with God, thus participating in *caritas* as part of the Christian community. This need for community arises from each person's recognition of the impossibility of self-immanence. The souls in Dante's *Purgatorio* thus constitute a community of longing for the divine, a community that, however imperfectly, embodies *caritas* in human form. As Nancy defines it, the community is composed of individuals at the brink of their finitude: "the being of community *is* the exposure of singularities" (30-original emphasis). The exposure of these singularities is the sacrifice of human selfishness.

Despite this individual finitude, however, Nancy claims, "At bottom, it is impossible for us to lose community" (35). Because of our dependence on other beings for existence, we can never be separate from the community. Before God creates Eve in Eden, Adam is incomplete because he has no partner (Genesis 2:18), no human equal. When God makes and presents Eve to Adam, Adam says, "This *at last* is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23-my emphasis). In the original Hebrew, this passage reads, "Zot Hapa'am etzem mei'atzamai, uvasar mib'sari.' L'zot yikarei isha, ki mei-ish luk'ha zot" and effects the meaning of "this is *now*" the case. The word "now" suggests Adam's temporal longing for one who could be like him, "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." As such, according to Judeo-Christian tradition, humans were created to be relational, created to need community. The Fall of Adam and Eve disrupted humanity's community with God. Community after Original Sin brings to the forefront human finitude by destroying the individual's perception of his or her own self-immanence, self-importance, and self-sufficiency. Regarding community after the Fall, Nancy

postulates that "the [community] is…nothing other than what undoes, in its very principle—and at its closure or on its limit—the autarchy of absolute immanence" (4). Community is thus an acknowledgment of human finitude, and in this recognition, community "henceforth constitutes the limit of the human as well as of the divine" (11) and constitutes the ability to appreciate, recognize, and long for the other.

This bordered, liminal existence in human finitude, affords humankind the possibility to enter the presence of the divine. As Bernard and Bonaventura both discuss, only when one acknowledges absolute and utter dependence on the grace of God may one be accepted into the divine realm of Paradise: "Grace is the foundation of the rectitude of the will" (Bonaventura 63). Human beings are dependent upon God's grace to inform them of the need to rectify their wills in accordance with the will of the divine, and only through that grace is eternal life possible. As Dante constructs the Christian afterlife, only when the self is abandoned in favor of the divine other, the not-self, is the Christian worthy of entering Paradise. In abandoning the self, the façade of individual autonomy is relinquished and participation in that which exceeds the self's being and understanding is accepted (Ephesians 3:19). In this way, Bataille's theory of excess as it incorporates medieval theology again informs this new reading of the *Commedia* because the self is expended to reunite with the divine excess that is the sacred other. Nancy's ontological and fundamentally Christian argument is this: "Being 'itself' comes to be defined as relational, as non-absoluteness, and…*as community*" (6-original emphasis). As such, community is ever-present, even when only in longing for the other.

Community is formed by and participates in *caritas*, the love of the divine driven both by the desire to love God and to acknowledge God's love for all of creation. This is only a

Christian community for Dante: entrance into Purgatory demands that one be Christian because only believing Christians have accepted Jesus' sacrifice and thus been redeemed by accepting and acknowledging the *caritas* God has offered them. Virgil is the only exception to this rule, and yet in the medieval era, he was seen as a proto-Christian, and his works were interpreted allegorically in terms of morality. Additionally, Virgil serves only as a guide for Dante, and he resides eternally in Limbo. The souls in Purgatory are part of the larger Christian community that includes all those who willfully acknowledge their desire for communion with God, and in *caritas*, they demonstrate an abundance of love for one another and for Dante not according to their individual will and acknowledgment of different selves, but as brothers and sisters in Christ. The *caritas* evident in Purgatory suggests that as the individuals come to acknowledge their own insignificance, they take pleasure in the omnipresent, omniscient divine, that which is beyond their human experience. A sense of community is inherent in *caritas*: human beings participate in the love God has for humankind by loving everything and everyone else in turn. Community brings together two or more different entities which then interact and are thus defined by and against each other. Without community, one would not be bound by relations with another being and would thus lack self-definition. Without the self-definition achieved through interactions with others, Dante would not be an individual as part of a community: he would no longer exist as a person, since a singular being exists only in relation to another.

The *caritas* in the *Purgatorio* would be impossible without Dante's interaction with several different people who can point him more perfectly to that divine love which he seeks. Dante thus depends on the direction of others in order to proceed on his journey throughout Purgatory. Virgil explains to Dante that love is the succinct yet all-encompassing organizing

principle of Purgatory (2.26.112-139), emphasizing the importance of the other through the remainder of his journey. The protagonist always wants someone with him: he desires the other and repeatedly depends on his interactions with others in order to facilitate his journey. The other, that is, the guide or the soul from Purgatory, interacts with Dante as a result of *caritas*. Dante is only capable of knowing his own limits and recognizing his depravity in the context of other entities. Dante's participation in community forces him to reject his notion of self-sufficiency because he is dependent upon the souls in Purgatory to continue his journey toward the divine. In his repeated conversations with others, Dante acknowledges his need for guidance and information from the souls atoning for their earthly sins. This dependence on others is a dependence on the community, a community without which Dante's journey would not be successful. Virgil is a primary example of this dependence, as he is Dante's guide to Purgatory in the beginning after they emerge from the infernal region of the afterworld (1.33.136-139). Virgil is mindful of Dante's shortcomings throughout their journey and repeatedly encourages him to continue his pilgrimage toward heaven while also answering Dante's questions to the best of his ability. Even in Eden, the place representing the existence of humanity before sin, the mortal Dante requires guidance from Matelda and Beatrice to symbolically acknowledge the point of his turpitude. While Virgil is an effective guide throughout the first stages of Dante's journey, Dante's emerging Christian understanding ultimately surpasses the more philosophical knowledge Virgil can impart. As such, Matelda and Beatrice guide Dante to embrace the annihilation of his individuated being so that he may enter the realm of the divine.

Exposing Dante's dependence on the community formed with his guides, Dante becomes scared when he believes he is alone in Purgatory: he "turn[s] the deathly color of a

man/feeling the freezing grip of fright on him" (2.9.41-42). Dante fears for the preservation of his identity as himself, as community preserves and defines the self in relation to others. However, his fear is unfounded because Virgil does not abandon him: Dante is still in community and cannot lose that community because his journey was divinely sanctioned. His initial tour of the afterlife was facilitated by Beatrice in the spirit of divine love, as "compassion breaks Heaven's stern decree" (1.3.96). Though he is a pilgrim, Dante is at the mercy of others in order to participate in and complete his journey. He has no direction toward the divine without the assistance of and participation in community. Just as he is incapable of navigating Hell alone, so also is he unable to find the way up Mount Purgatory by himself. Dante relies heavily upon his guides, who give him the knowledge and encouragement he needs to continue his journey. He is hindered by his own imperfect will, but through *caritas*, Dante receives divine encouragement through others that propels him forward in his spiritual journey as he becomes increasingly aware of his own insignificance. Community is thus a means by which Dante may disregard his individual personhood and participate more fully in *caritas*. Paradoxically, the more his soul is purified, the more wretched he understands himself to be. In this shedding of self and will, Dante begins to embrace a more powerful relationship with the divine. The actions of the penitent souls are driven by love of the divine, and these souls benefit both themselves and others. Dante depends on the *caritas* manifested in and through the other, and as such, he is never truly alone.

The directing force of community between self and other demonstrated in the *Purgatorio* highlights the power of *caritas* in Christian community. Dante's corporeality confines him to the physical limitations of his body: though all of the souls in Purgatory still

resemble humans, Dante as the living soul is the only figure to have a shadow, demonstrating his living corporeality. As such, he is restrained from participating fully in the profuse motion that supersedes human containment. However, Dante still encounters the overflowing grace of *caritas* through his interactions with others. Though each individual person or soul in Purgatory is also delimited by the restraint and confinement inherent in measured bodily existence, Dante can meet these people at the border of their mutual being. This is a demonstration of the nimiety of the self as manifested in the other. These individuals facilitate Dante's movement forward in his pilgrimage vision. The community created between Dante and these other souls is a bringing-together of self and other in gracious plenitude.

The *Purgatorio* in particular speaks to the progression of both time and space that Dante suggests, yet despite the common conception that progression implies linear movement, the progression of the *Commedia* as a whole is never fulfilled. As the only temporal realm of the Christian afterlife, Purgatory can only be understood in human terms of duration. The souls spend a certain number of years purging their sins as they ultimately become worthy to enter the kingdom of heaven. As such, the penitents in Purgatory might initially be understood to participate in a linear progression toward their salvation, since time is understood for humans as a linear progression of past, present, and future. The idea of a linear progression is a human construct that attempts to contain an understanding of the divine. However, due to the sacred, ontological otherness of the divine, this systematization must necessarily fail. Human beings essentially and necessarily lack understanding of the divine, but we set up a system to facilitate understanding on a human level. However, when human beings pass away, this illusory system will also disappear: as Paul writes, "Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I

have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Dante explains the different levels of the respective areas of the Christian afterlife in terms of circularity, at least with regard to the eternal realms of Hell and Heaven. Because Purgatory will eventually cease to exist at the end of time, humans understand it from a linear point of view, as it serves the specific purpose of rehabilitating humans. Even so, Dante does not progress straight up Mount Purgatory, but circles around it as he climbs, demonstrating motion that transcends the limits of linear progression. This profusion of movement indicates that even in Purgatory, the most human-like state of the Christian afterlife, the divine impinges on the ipseity of the individual, calling the soul into movement that surpasses a linear human, narrative experience. Though the very word progression indicates an eventual end, Dante's pilgrimage is never fully complete. At the conclusion of the physical text of the *Commedia*, Dante participates in the movement of heaven as he becomes "like a wheel in perfect balance turning" (3.33.143), moved by "the Love that moves the sun and the other stars" (3.33.145). Dante makes no reference to returning to the dark woods in which he was wandering aimlessly at the opening of the *Inferno*, nor does he end by bringing attention to the visionary nature of his pilgrimage, a characteristic of the poem easily forgotten as Dante tells his story. The only reference that can be made to any kind of termination of the journey is with the visionary nature of Dante's pilgrimage. As a vision, Dante's journey recalls the experiences, indicating a necessary distance from them. The divine supersedes the human experience and thus cannot be contained in any human system. Instead, transcribed motion becomes the poetic correlative of that which cannot be linguistically contained, as Dante is always moving in circles as he participates in the pilgrimage that will lead him to participation in the divine good.

Though Dante is constantly progressing in his journey, he does have temporary pauses in motion that indicate his humanity and therefore the particularity of his self. He is only capable of continuous movement once he has been purified completely by sacrificing the human self, fully participating in the divine that supersedes human schematization. In the *Purgatorio*, Dante has not yet ascended to that level of purity; though Dante has made considerable progress from his beginning, he has not yet abandoned his individual identity and sacrificed his particularity to be able to enter the heavenly realm where movement is a manifestation of divine joy. Like the other souls, Dante must rest when night falls: according to the law of Purgatory, "at night it is forbidden to ascend" (2.7.44). In Purgatory, the body still needs to rest because the souls are still limited by their corporeality and their imperfect human wills. Even as Dante rests in the liminal place between Purgatory and Eden, he rests at night because "the nature of the mountain [of Purgatory] took from us [Virgil, Statius, and Dante]/as much the power as the desire to climb" (2.27.74-75). The singular being contains only so much energy, and rest in Purgatory is thus a gift given by God. Because the soul has not yet been transformed through the power of the perfected will to a constant state of glorious movement, the rest or stasis becomes part of the purgation process that will eventually be completed. As such, Dante must pause because Purgatory makes him increasingly aware of his own interstitial, liminal, human existence.

As Dante is called to step into the fire that will allow him to cross the boundary between Purgatory and Eden, his human will prevents him from immediately entering the fire. The fear that results from Dante's human will is instrumental in the oscillation between his movement and stasis. Focusing and relying on his own imperfect understanding of his journey, Dante does

not recognize the beauty and importance of the profligated human will in favor of the divine will. Instead of immediately entering the fire, Dante finds himself "immobile—and ashamed" (2.27.33), conscious of his limitations. Though Virgil, Dante's guide throughout Hell and Purgatory, implores Dante tirelessly to enter the fire where "there may be pain…but there is no death" (2.27.21), Dante is still constrained by his concerns for his physicality: "Gripping my hands together, I leaned forward/and, staring at the fire, I recalled/what human bodies look like burned to death" (2.27.16-18). Despite Virgil's entreaty, Dante remains afraid that his physical body will be burned. Dante's shame in his immobility indicates that he is not following the divine will but rather is heeding his own will at this point out of his anxiety to preserve his corporeal self. Dante is conflicted: his will, as it has been shaped throughout his pilgrimage to be ever more in alignment with God's will, tells him that his logic is mistaken. However, in spite of knowing that he should enter the fire and being ashamed at his inaction and inability to do so, Dante remains a slave to the human desire for self-preservation. Though Dante equates his non-movement with shame, his will is not yet perfected to the point that allows him to enter the fire without reservation. Dante does not understand that the fire is a spiritually cleansing fire that will allow him to renounce his sinful self in order to be in community with the divine. Though the intense heat of the fire makes Dante claim "I would have gladly jumped/into the depths of boiling glass to find/relief from that intensity of heat" (2.27.49-51), Virgil assures him that the fire will not sear his flesh: "if you spent/a thousand years within the fire's heart,/it would not singe a single hair of yours" (2.27.25-27). The fire bordering and delimiting Purgatory proper is thus a fire that purifies and cleanses Dante's soul. This rejection of the human will manifested in Dante's eventual entrance into the fire ultimately facilitates Dante's

continuation on his pilgrimage. His anguish, born out of his concern for his own corporeality, is a result of his belief in his own individuality. Only by accepting the need to reject the self may Dante continue his pilgrimage. As R. A. Shoaf notes in *Dante, Chaucer, and the Currency of the Word*, Dante's will is perfected in the *Purgatorio*, but his reasoning remains flawed: "In Purgatory…with his will healed, Dante does see his shame, and the vision finally triumphs over narcissism, since neither desire nor belief impedes correct construction of his behavior and subsequent right action" (Shoaf 51). Dante does eventually cross into the fire, symbolically renouncing his self as he continues his journey toward Paradise.

Even after Dante passes through the fire, he is not yet in the Garden of Eden. While Dante is in the fire, Virgil "trie[s] to comfort [him],/talking of Beatrice as [they] moved: 'Already I can see her eyes, it seems!'" (2.27.52-54). The 'already' suggests temporality which fits only within the realm of human existence, not that of the divine, the wholly (holy) other. However, the anticipation of seeing Beatrice suggests that Dante is forced into movement in longing for the divine, as his desire to see his beloved increases. During Dante's time in the fire, "there came to [him] a voice,/singing to guide [them]" (2.27.55-56). This voice, as it guides Dante in his ascent toward Eden, acts as an intercession that compels Dante forward in his journey. As night falls again shortly after Dante emerges from the fire, he is "shut in by walls of stone, this side and that" (2.27.87) as he goes to sleep. This enclosure signifies the physical limits to which Dante must adhere. Dante's confinement in the space between Purgatory proper and the Garden of Eden itself suggests the gap between God and humanity after the Fall, a gap bridged only in an acceptance of *caritas*.

Eden represents the creation of community. According to the biblical account, when man was first created, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner" (Genesis 2:18). In the creation of two human beings, God instigates human community. Eden is where humans go because it symbolizes a return to a lost community and the loss of intimacy between God and humanity, and this is why Dante is so ardently searching for it. This lost community is what 'home' signifies: it is simultaneously a loss of the location of community and a loss of the community between God and humanity. The souls return to the state that was once inhabited by humankind; however, they find Eden is empty and has been since Adam and Eve were banished from the garden. However, Eden also represents the creation of community (and the need for that community) with the Fall, with Original Sin. Eden represents both idealism and the fall of humanity, both of which suggest a birth of community. Eden has long been considered the idyllic garden, the symbol of earthly perfection. God created Eden and gave it into humanity's keeping, and people nostalgically long for that earthly perfection, that purity and simplicity not corrupted by the mark of Original Sin. With Original Sin, however, Eden becomes tainted. Adam and Eve were given free will, and when tested, they sinned and turned away from God. However, it is in this turning away from God that humankind may turn back to God, thus facilitating a return to the source of emanation. Free will thus effects the return to God, just as through Adam and Eve it resulted in separation from God. As Adam and Eve came to depend on each other as a community, so did they foster the human race, the souls of which constantly desire a return to the garden they never inhabited as their individual, temporally and spatially located selves.

As he wakes the next morning and prepares to enter the Garden of Eden, Dante refers to the proximity of 'home,' a metaphorical space for community. Dante claims that "before the splendor of the dawn/(more welcomed by the homebound pilgrim now, the closer he awakes to home each day),/night's shadows disappeared on every side" (2.27.109-112). Because Dante presents himself as the 'homebound pilgrim,' he associates his journey with a progression wherein there is a destination for the 'end' of the journey, with a pilgrimage that has an ultimate purpose and direction, that direction being the 'home' of heaven and communion with the divine. Dante also notes that the pilgrim is closer each day to his home, although this refers to heaven as his spiritual home rather than to his physical location. Therefore, Dante refers to the 'home' as an abstract, intangible location encompassing the Garden of Eden as the home of humanity and heaven as the home of God. Home is thus not a physical location but an idea that suggests movement toward that which it describes. Dante's increasing proximity to Eden as the manifestation of Christian home-ness for humanity indicates that movement toward 'home' is in fact a return to the ideal normative state of humanity before the Fall. The Italian word used is *tornando*, a derivative of *tornare*, the verb meaning "to come back" or "to return." Home is thus the return, not the 'end' a linear progression. This vocabulary in turn facilitates the understanding of the Garden of Eden as home to humanity before the Fall, as Eden is both the place of initial departure and of return. 'Home' is further correlated with *caritas*, as Dante's ultimate arrival in Eden suggests a return from the source of emanation. Because Eden was the place in which man and woman first existed without sin, it follows that when a soul has been purged of sin, it would then abide in the Garden of Eden until such time as God intervenes on the soul's behalf and admits it into heaven. Though human imperfection makes the achievement

of heaven impossible, Christianity makes redemption possible if people completely accept the sacrifice of Jesus, who submitted his will completely to God: "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14:36). As the ultimate representative of sacrifice and *caritas* in human form, Jesus creates the space for community, and only through Jesus is the existence of Purgatory even possible. As Dante moves closer to Eden, he symbolically moves closer to the return to the pre-sinful state of humanity in the garden. Dante is not yet 'at' home but he is every day 'closer' to that which will be his eternal home in heaven. The very abstraction of the metaphorical 'home' indicates an ideological space in which community can once again form between God and humanity.

Once Dante approaches the Garden of Eden, his abundant movement becomes even more pronounced, as he is consciously aware of his participation in God's glory. As Dante nears the garden, he "without delay…[leaves] the bank behind/and…[makes] [his] way across the plain" (2.28.4-5). In this way, Dante advances and moves forward in his pilgrimage. Dante's immediate movement, suggested by the temporal phrase "without delay," indicates that Dante's will has become more perfected. Unlike in the fire, Dante in this instance immediately seeks that which will more fully engage him in the experience of the divine. He is no longer impeded by his self-centered anguish of bodily preservation, as he was with the flames dividing Purgatory and Eden when he felt immobile and ashamed. Instead, he is 'without' that hindrance, his belief in his own individuation diminishing as he continues to ever more fully participate in movement and God's magnificence. Again, however, Dante's motion suggests the spatial and temporal locality of Purgatory as Dante progresses from the bank to embark upon the process of traversing the plain.

In the process of Dante's progression across the plain toward Eden, he sees Matelda on the other side of the river bank. In the interaction between Dante and Matelda, language serves to call forth the other into community and religious intimacy. As that which is vocalized, language brings Dante (and the reader) into community. Language thus serves as the place of coming together. Throughout Purgatory, the souls sing songs of praise and exultation to God. In the humanlike state of corporeality and physically bounded existence, human conditions that those in Purgatory have, singing is a form of exaltation and praise that is readily available to these souls. In particular, Matelda sings songs on the other side of the river (2.28.41), and Dante calls her to come closer to him, making a physical community in the closeness of bodies: "come/a little nearer to the river's bank,/that I may understand the words you sing" (2.28.46-48). He does not give a specific demand that she be in any particular location, but instead he requests that she be somehow 'closer' or 'nearer,' thus highlighting Matelda and Dante's mutual proximity. Asking Matelda to 'come' suggests that there is some gap between their physical, spatial locations that impedes Dante's progression at that moment in his journey. Dante's request indicates his desire for closer proximity with the woman who is singing. Dante longs to hear the words Matelda sings; her words call him out of himself and into community as a meeting place of the singer and the listener, a community that exults in the abandonment of the self and the praise of the divine. Her words move Dante physically to continue his narrative of the *Commedia*.

Importantly, narrative is the means by which Dante has chosen to convey his visionary experience in a progressive form. However, as a simultaneous communication through language and other musical aesthetics, the song Matelda sings draws Dante outside of himself. The

sonorous quality of the song and the experience of the music Dante has supersede mere linguistic communication, suggesting that his experience cannot be restrained to the confines of language. In response to hearing the initial sounds of the song, Dante requests that Matelda come to the "river's bank" (2.28.47), a physical boundary that separates the interstitial space between Purgatory and the Garden of Eden itself. The riverbank thus indicates that there is a separation that has yet to be bridged but that must be traversed in order for Dante's journey to continue. When Matelda approaches the riverbank as Dante has implored her to do, she is physically closer to Dante but still separated by the flowing river that demarcates the Garden of Eden. The physical community of bodies is thus not the only representation of community: language both traverses and bridges boundaries.

Dante remains on the other side of the river until Beatrice appears. Dante cannot enter the actual Garden of Eden without being drawn into the Lethe, the mythological river of forgetfulness. Once Dante sees Beatrice, he is overcome by her divine magnificence and imposing presence: he is utterly and completely captivated by her. As such, he neglects all thought of himself and focuses only her presence. Only with this absolute denial of the self does Dante ultimately become worthy of entering the Garden of Eden. Like the son who decides to humble himself before his father (God), and acknowledges to himself that he has "sinned against heaven and before you [God]; I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:18-19), Dante must acknowledge his own sin and nothingness in order to enter the garden in a spirit of *caritas*. Like the prodigal's son who is welcomed home after a long, spiritually fruitless venture abroad, so too is Dante eventually accepted into the Garden of Eden. Beatrice interceded on Dante's behalf and made his journey through the afterlife possible to save him

from damnation. She is the emissary of God who permits Dante to enter the Garden. Beatrice chastises Dante for his lack of fidelity and his transitory nature and demands that he properly atone for his transgressions: "the highest laws of God would be annulled/if he crossed Lethe, drinking its sweet flow,/without having to pay at least some scot/of penitence poured forth in guilty tears" (2.31.142-145). As explained by Beatrice, the will of God demands that Dante be purified before he enter Eden and then heaven. Beatrice's strong words, though they seem harsh at first, are delivered in a spirit of *caritas*. Only with the breakdown of the individual self, the recognition of the mistaken belief in one's own self-sufficiency and the veracity of one's own will, may anyone come to knowingly participate in the divine good that God has sanctioned for all Christian souls who truly desire communion with the divine.

Dante is still, however, limited by his corporeality in the expression of his emotions. He is overcome by "the stabbing pain of [his] remorse," saying, "what I had loved the most of all things/that were not she, I hated now the most" (2.31.85-86). Dante's newfound hatred for 'all the things that were not she' indicates that his will is in the process of the perfection that will lead him to become worthy to taste the sweet waters of the Lethe. He renounces those material things in favor of the divine as represented by Beatrice. He renounces himself and hates his former self that did not love Beatrice for the emanation of God that she represented: Beatrice herself says, "There was a time my countenance sufficed,/as I let [Dante] look into my young eyes/for guidance on the straight path to his goal" (2.30.121-123). The pain that Dante endures when his transgressions are made manifest to him is too much for him to linguistically understand and even too much for his body to endure: "The recognition of my guilt so stunned/my heart, I fainted. What happened then is known/only to her who was the cause of it"

(2.31.88-90). In feeling this remorse and penitence, Dante exists for a time in the liminal space between sin and salvation, no longer a sinner but not yet saved. In this way, the emotional expenditure of the self in pre-linguistic terms demonstrates an awareness of the necessity of Beatrice and Dante meeting and mutually coming together in the spirit of *caritas*. Even as Beatrice demands that Dante "speak!" and "seal with [his] confession" (2.31.5-6) the charges she brings against him, Dante "[i]s shattered by the intensity/of [his] emotions: tears and sighs burst forth, as [he] released [his] voice about to fail" (2.31.19-21). Only with Dante's verbal confession, necessarily accompanied by and ultimately overwhelmed by "the stabbing pain of remorse" (2.31.85) that results in him fainting, does Dante become worthy of drinking of the stream of Lethe to forget all of those sins that he committed in his lifetime. Again, words lead Dante on a journey to reunite him with God. Words thus help breach the division that prevents community.

Since communication is vital to the understanding of the text of Dante's *Commedia*, it is interesting to note that there are points at which language devolves into emotional utterances that are not part of any systematized language. Overcome with emotion, Dante lacks adequate language to describe or impart the experience for the reader. This is particularly true of those instances in which Dante is brought into super-awareness of his own depraved humanity and his own insignificance in the face of Beatrice, who has been made holy by God. The surfeit of Dante's emotion shows his human limitations. While the meta-linguistic expression in these times of extreme emotion may be seen as regression in one's development, it is in fact a return to a meta-linguistic state, just as Dante is symbolically 'returning' to Eden.

Though the Garden of Eden is no longer inhabited by the human race, in Dante's representation of the Christian afterlife it remains a resting place, the liminal existence where each soul returns to a state of perfect humanity before ascending to heaven. This perfect humanity is humanity as God intended: humans have free will that is now nearly perfectly aligned with the divine will. Dante's arrival in Eden is the result of the *caritas*. Eden exemplifies the dual nature of *caritas*: there is a sense of compulsion that remains even as Dante has finished climbing Mount Purgatory and at the close of the *Purgatorio* is "reborn…immaculate,/eager to rise, now ready for the stars" (2.33.143-145). After submitting "his weakened powers" (2.33.129) to the flow of the Eunoë river, that which restores the memory of good deeds, Dante can go no further without transcending his physical self. Eden thus symbolizes a sense of human completion with the elimination of all earthly sin. It is the pinnacle of what a human may achieve on his or her own in a state without sin. Eden exposes the limits of what the human may do, and as the brink of human existence, Eden only makes the human soul more aware of the eternal yearning it has for the divine. In its purest human state, Dante's soul wants to rise into the spheres of heaven, concerned now only with his longing for the divine that draws him outside of himself.

In order for Dante to enter Paradise on this journey, he must look at Beatrice (his guide and intercessor) and become what he calls 'transhumanized' [*trasumanar*]. Prominent Dantean commentators C. Grandgent and Charles Singleton candidly state the uncertainty regarding the corporeality of Dante's existence in Paradise: "Dante is not sure whether he took his body with him to Heaven, or left it behind" (Grandgent and Singleton 217). Of the 'transhumanizing' experience, Dante says, "it cannot be explained/*per verba*, so let this example serve/until God's

grace grants the experience" (3.1.70-72). Language must suffice as the means to explanation until such time as the linguistic may be transcended and the experiential take its place. Language is the vehicle of a fallen society that cannot ever impart an experience, the unadulterated thoughts, emotions, and realities of an individual. Words are insufficient because they, in and of themselves, are mere representations of that to which they refer. Dante acknowledges his linguistic barrier and limitations, noting that he is incapable of voicing that which he experienced in heaven: "I have been in His brightest shining heaven/and seen such things that no man, once returned/from there, has wit or skill to tell about" (3.1.4-6).

Once Dante moves into the *Paradiso*, he continues to address issues of proximity with eternal yearning, though now in terms of an unbridgeable gap between that which is knowable in a narrative, or in human terms, as compared with that which can be experienced in a vision, wherein the divine supra-linguistically impinges upon the human experience. Once Dante has been purged and is allowed to enter heaven by becoming 'transhumanized,' he begins to see "the great sphere [the heavens] that spins, yearning for You [God]/eternally" (3.1.76-77). The entirety of the heavenly universe participates in this divine yearning, *caritas* as ever in the circular process of emanation and return. Dante expounds that "for when our intellect draws near its goal/and fathoms to the depths of its desire,/the memory is powerless to follow" (3.1.7-9). In this way, Dante explicitly acknowledges that the intellect, or human reason, is incapable of articulating the ultimate "brightest shining heaven" (3.1.4) that he experienced. Dante admits his own inability to capture that 'goal,' the heavenly experience that he attempts to articulate and fails to do so. Dante's *Commedia* is thus an admittedly failed articulation of experience. The description of the lost unity that originates in community between God and humanity

effects the closest proximity possible in language. However, Dante's admission of failure suggests that proximity is all that we can hope to contain in language, because the experiential component of Dante's visionary experience must necessarily surpass language and narrative form.

The voice suggests the linguistic communication with the other that draws the self into the recognition of the other with whom he creates community. For Dante, the narrative form must suffice as a means of conveying experience. The linguistic medium of communication is inherently imperfect because it does not re-present that which is experienced but instead can only represent the past experience. Dante expresses poetic restraint because the linguistic aspect of the experience is limited and finite: the *Commedia* is made up of a certain number of words in a text. The author cannot directly impart an experience for the reader but must instead rely on the medium of language to suggest the experience, especially because of the systemized poetic form of *terza rima*.

However, the poetic form that Dante uses allows him to suggest an aspect of the content of the literature and of the experience that he cannot access linguistically. The form is representative of the *Commedia*'s context in excess. In using the poetic structure of *terza rima*, Dante appeals to the aesthetics of the work as a means of more adequately portraying his vision than mere words alone could convey. The poetic form of *terza rima* allows Dante to suggest through a non-linguistic means of communication that which he experienced, the longing for that which is to come. While this too is an imperfect conveyance of experience, as experience cannot be adequately conveyed through any finite medium, the non-linguistic aspect of the form indirectly suggests the experience that cannot be vocalized. Finally, the poetic structure of *terza*

rima that Dante uses throughout the *Commedia* suggests a constant progression and moving forward in the text, manifesting content through form. *Terza rima*, or third rhyme, is the poetic structure of aba, bcb, cdc, etc. In this way, there is already in the middle of the first tercet a suggestion of that which is to come, also indicating that that tercet is not the last. Though the *terza rima* is often lost due to the more literal translation of the content of the language Dante used, the original intention of the structure and its impact on the reading must be taken into account. Such a movement suggests that Dante was very much aware of the idea of progression on multiple levels in his work, and he uses the form of the poetic structure to indicate the theme and unifying principle of movement throughout the *Purgatorio* and even the *Commedia* as a whole. *Terza rima* suggests progress out of that which came before, indicating a simultaneously linear and circular progression that is situated simultaneously in the past and in the future while constituting the present as a relation of both temporal absences.

Holistically, Dante's *Commedia* addresses universal human concerns regarding the self, the other, and the community, drawing upon the medieval theological and philosophical precepts of Boethius, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Bonaventura. Initially blinded by his desire for self-preservation, Dante's spiritual journey draws him outside of himself and into the Christian community of longing for God and participating in the divine good. In the visionary journey Dante endeavors to narrate, the notions of the individual and self-sufficiency are discarded in favor of increasingly contingent relations of singular beings in a community of eternal longing for the divine, as re-envisioned by Georges Bataille and Jean-Luc Nancy in terms of expenditure, sacrifice, and otherness. Within the structure of the narrative, motion is a poetic manifestation of divine excess in the wake of community. Dante simultaneously participates in

his limited linear progression in Purgatory while also exemplifying through movement the excess of self that is found in the other and in the divine. In particular, the organizing principle of *caritas* in the *Purgatorio* speaks to Dante's ex-static return toward community with the divine other: he must always be in transition as he moves toward that which his soul desires. Hindered by corporeality, finitude, and human perversion of the divine will, Dante must constantly strive for community with God. Renouncing his self and his will, Dante abandons his mistaken belief in his own self-sufficiency to return to the state of perfect humanity. Dante is called forth by the language and experience of the other into community. As Dante nears Eden, he identifies the archetypal Christian community in which, through the divine grace of God, he forgets the self. Dante then transcends the physical borders of Purgatory and Eden to participate in the *caritas* of the divine that he admittedly cannot articulate. In this failed articulation of experience, Dante suggests the nature of the self's recognition of the excess suggested by the other, and the poem becomes a testament to the experiential excess of coming into community with the divine other. *Caritas* thus becomes a means by which Dante, and indeed every Christian, metaphorically returns home to participate as "wheel[s] in perfect balance turning" (3.33.143) in the divine good that defies human schematization of space, time, and self.

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