

Dante's "Afterlife" in William Dyce's Paintings

by

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ABSTRACT

This Master's thesis locates four works by William Dyce inspired by Dante Alighieri's *Commedia*: *Francesca da Rimini* (1837), *Design for the Reverse of the Turner Medal* (1858), *Beatrice* (1859), and *Dante and Beatrice* (date unknown) in the context of their literary, artistic and personal influences. It will be shown that, far from assimilating the poet to a pantheon of important worthies, Dyce found in Dante contradictions and challenges to his Victorian, Anglican way of thinking. In this thesis these contradictions and challenges are explicated in each of the four works.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

On May 5, 1865, one year after William Dyce's death, an auction of the late artist's estate was held. One of the largest of the works sold was an unfinished canvas depicting Dante and Beatrice ascending through Paradise [Fig. 1]. As is typical with even Dyce's finished paintings, the work bears no signature or date. No record of a commission for the painting exists, nor does the artist mention the work in his letters. The story of Dante and Beatrice no doubt appealed to the artist as a symbol for divine love, as it did for many Victorians; yet, as Alison Milbank has noted in her recent study on the Victorian reception of Dante, there is something unusual in the artist's choice of subject.¹ Why would an Anglican Scot depict a medieval, Roman Catholic poet? Dante's poetry is characterized by devotion to a married woman whom he compares to Christ, who leads him through a Hell the painter found abhorrent, a Purgatory in which the painter did not believe, and to a Paradise bearing little relation to the Dyce family burial plot outside Aberdeen's Kirk of St Nicholas.² This Master's thesis sheds light on the literary, artistic and religious sympathies which make this and other paintings by the artist based on Dante's poetry possible. By tracing Dyce's deepening interest in Dante during the course of his career as a Victorian painter and thinker, the result is a more clearly defined image of the artist. In this introductory chapter the focus begins with Dante and his reception during the nineteenth century. The chapter then discusses the scope and research which govern this discussion.

¹ Alison Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998).

² Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians*, 1.

Dante Alighieri

Poet, philosopher, and politician Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) was born to a low-aristocratic Florentine family. A disciple of scholar and statesman Brunetto Latini, (1220-1294), in his youth Dante wrote poetry and was influenced by the *stilnovisti*,³ especially Bolognese poet Guido Guinizzelli (c. 1230-1276), whose works are characterized by vibrant descriptions of female beauty as a mediation between divine and earthly love. After the death of childhood acquaintance Bice (Beatrice) di Folco Portinari in 1290, the poet began studying philosophy, theology, and politics in earnest.

During the next decade Dante's political career grew quickly, culminating in his election as *priore* in 1300.⁴ Like many Florentines, Dante was embroiled in Guelph-Ghibelline conflicts. As a Guelph he fought in the Battle of Campaldino (1289) against Aretine Ghibellines. After defeating the Ghibellines, the Guelphs divided into two factions: the Whites and Blacks. Dante belonged to the former, which took power and expelled the Blacks. In response, Pope Boniface VIII (c. 1235-1303), who had the support of the Black Guelphs, planned a military occupation of Florence. As *priore*, Dante opposed papal intervention. In 1301, the poet was exiled when the Black Guelphs, with the support of Charles of Valois (1270-1325), took control of Florence. Defeated, Dante was indicted and sentenced to exile. The poet continued to compose poetry and

³ Artists of the *stil novo* style, an important thirteenth-century Italian literary movement which deals primarily with the theme of courtly love. The name *dolce stil novo* was used for the first time by Dante in canto 24 of *Purgatorio* when thirteenth-century Italian poet Bonagiunta Orbicciani, tells Dante that he and other poets of his circle have created a *stil novo* (new literary style).

⁴ The office of *priore*, essentially an elected city manager, was held by six men and lasted for 2 months. Dante served as *priore* from June 15 to August 15, 1300.

treatises while roving the Italian courts of Verona, Lunigiana, Poppi and Lucca. In 1319 he removed to the court of Guido Novello da Polenta in Ravenna, where he died in 1321.

Vita nuova and *Commedia*

Although Beatrice is the center of two of Dante's most popular works—his *Vita nuova* and *Commedia*—the poet claims to have met her on only two occasions. Dante saw, for the first time at the age of eight “*la gloriosa donna de la mia mente, la quale fu chiamata da molti Beatrice*”.⁵ Nine years later the pair met for the last time when Beatrice passed Dante on a street in Florence and ‘saluted’ him.⁶ This act of gracious condescension filled Dante, a disciple of courtly love, with such elation that *come inebriato*⁷ he returned to his room where he dreamed the dream which would become the subject of the first sonnet in his *Vita nuova*.⁸ Though never mentioned by the poet, Beatrice would later marry the banker Simone dei Bardi in 1287 and die three years later at the age of 24.

Despite his own marriage to Gemma Donati, the poet remained devoted to Beatrice after her death, composing poems dedicated to her memory which would become the *Vita nuova* (c.1283-1293), which recounts Dante's love of Beatrice from first sight to his mourning after her death and his determination to write of her “*quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna*.”⁹ The poems present a frame story, composed not in the expected Latin but in Italian, together with short prose narratives and commentary, which

⁵ Dante, *Vita nuova*, I.

⁶ See note 106 below.

⁷ Dante, *Vita nuova*, III.

⁸ In this dream a personage appeared before him, and spoke to him saying “*Ego dominus tuus*”. In the figure's arms was Beatrice, sleeping and covered lightly by a crimson cloth. The figure awoke Beatrice, and bade her eat Dante's burning heart.

⁹ Dante, *Vita nuova*, XLXX.

further refines Dante's concept of romantic love as the initial step in a spiritual development that results in the capacity for divine love.

Dante reinforces this idea in the epic poem *Commedia* (c. 1307-21), where Beatrice becomes his guide through Paradise. Allegorically, the poem represents the soul's journey towards God. Written in the first person, the *Commedia* tells of Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, from the night before Good Friday to the Wednesday after Easter in the spring of 1300. At Beatrice's intercession, the Roman poet Virgil guides Dante through Hell and Purgatory. In the last four *canti* of *Purgatorio*, Beatrice takes over as guide for Virgil who, as a pagan, cannot enter Paradise. As the incarnation of beatific love, as her name implies, Beatrice leads the pilgrim to the beatific vision—a state of immediate nearness with God, blessedly free from will and wish.¹⁰

Dante's Afterlife

The works of Dante have had a powerful effect upon later writers and artists. In the course of the fourteenth century, the *Commedia* rapidly became a model and resource for the Florentine poet and humanist Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) and a precedent for vernacular writing by English poet Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343-1400). Within a century of Dante's death, the poem achieved imposing literary influence until the publication of *De monarchia* in the sixteenth century, when the author began to figure largely in the battle between Roman Catholics and Protestants over the soul of England; thereafter, Dante's fame as a poet began to be eclipsed by his renown as a political or

¹⁰ Dante, *Vita nuova*, II.

religious polemicist.¹¹ Despite the interest of Milton in the 1630s, Neoclassicists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—engrossed with clearing away the cobwebs of medieval thought—spurned the poet’s contradictions of rational order, purpose, and morality. The British Dantist Paget Toynbee (1855-1932) notes in *Dante in English Literature from Chaucer to Cary (c. 1380-1844)* the paucity of allusions to the poet in the writings of literary figures during the eighteenth century.¹²

It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that Neoclassical hostility to Dante met the emotive counter-currents of Romanticism. For many of the same reasons eighteenth-century writers and artists rejected the *Commedia* and its author, the Romantics embraced them. This reassessment of Dante is especially a notable feature of English Romanticism.¹³ It is evident in the criticisms of Ugo Foscolo, A. W. Schlegel and especially Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who offered a serious critical evaluation of medieval literature as different, rather than inferior or “barbaric”, as it was often viewed during the eighteenth century. In his 1818 lecture series delivered on Donne, Milton and Dante, Coleridge canonized Dante as a poet who unified art, philosophy and religion more fully than any other poet. This lecture, coupled with the first nineteenth-century English translation of the *Commedia*—Henry Francis Cary’s *The Vision* (1806-1814)—played a pivotal role in popularizing Dante in the English-speaking world.¹⁴ By 1821, Percy Shelley (1792-1822) wrote in *A Defense of Poetry* that Dante was among modern

¹¹ Jackson Campbell Boswell, *Dante’s Fame in England: References in Printed English Books 1477-1640*. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), xv.

¹² Paget Toynbee, *Dante in English Literature from Chaucer to Cary (c. 1380-1844)* (London: Methuen & Co., 1909).

¹³ Nick Havely, ed., *Dante’s Modern Afterlife: Reception and Response from Blake to Heaney* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 2.

¹⁴ Henry Cary, trans., *The Vision, or, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, of Dante Alighieri* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, 1814).

writers who are “philosophers of the loftiest power”, asserting that his poetry “may be considered as the bridge thrown over the stream of time, which unites the modern and ancient world”.¹⁵

Dante received similar enthusiastic treatment by artists. On the Continent, painters Ingres, Delacroix, Scheffer, Cornelius, Veit, Feuerbach and Koch extolled episodes from the *Commedia* on canvas and plaster. In Britain, Swiss painter Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) represented the *Commedia* in dramatic wash drawings and oils from *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. Sculptor and draughtsman John Flaxman (1755-1826) created the first complete set of line engravings for the *Commedia*. These would serve as illustrations for the poem in various editions during the next half century until Gustave Doré published his own collection of engravings for the *Commedia* in the 1860s. Between 1824 and his death in 1827, poet, painter and printmaker William Blake (1757-1827) offered his own subjective vision to Cary’s translation of the *Commedia* in a series wash drawings commissioned by the painter John Linnell.

Dante and the Victorians

The impetus given to Dante’s fame by the Romantics gathered momentum in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Victorian visitors to Italy frequently carried Dante’s works with them on their travels. In Florence, visits to the Romanesque Battistero di San Giovanni were enhanced by Dante’s description “il mio bel San Giovanni” in *Inferno* XIX.¹⁶ Travelers would visit Dante’s *sasso*, a seat near the Duomo

¹⁵ Percy Bysshe Shelly, *A Defense of Poetry* (published posthumously in 1840). Quoted in Nick Havely, *Dante* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 231.

¹⁶ Dante, *Inferno*, XIX, 17.

where, according to tradition, the poet sat and pondered about love and life while the building was still rising from its foundations. After 1840, visitors to the Bargello could see a youthful portrait of the poet in a chapel supposedly painted by Giotto. At Pisa, visitors could recall the well-known episode of Ugolino and his sons from canto XXXII of *Inferno* and the tower of famine.¹⁷ In Ravenna, they might remember how Dante compared the pleasant air of the Earthly Paradise to the sound of wind in the pine forests on the shore of Chiassi.¹⁸

Two eminent Victorians who carried copies of Dante with them on trips to Italy were statesman William Gladstone (1809-1898) and art critic and cultural theorist John Ruskin (1819-1900). Gladstone wrote that Dante was for him “a solemn master”.¹⁹ His diary entries detail how he first became aware of Dante’s *Commedia* through close friend Arthur Hallam. Gladstone read nearly all of the poet’s subsidiary works: *Vita nuova* on Christmas Day 1855, *De vulgari eloquentia* on January 2, 1861 and *De monarchia* the same week, and sustained serious Dante studies throughout his life. He published translations of passages from the *Commedia*, especially the *Paradiso cantica*, and even undertook a careful evaluation of whether Dante ever studied in Oxford.²⁰

John Ruskin’s interests in Dante are likewise well documented. Long before Ruskin named the poet “the central man in all the world” in 1856,²¹ his diaries reveal that he first read Dante properly during a trip to Europe in 1845. After the publication of the

¹⁷ The *Muda*, a tower belonging to the Gualandi family in which Count Ugolino della Gherardesca (c. 1220-1289) and his sons were starved to death.

¹⁸ Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXVIII, 19-20.

¹⁹ John Morley, *The life of William Ewart Gladstone* (Michigan: University of Michigan Library, 1903), 151. Quoted in Anne Isba, *Gladstone and Dante: Victorian Statesman, Medieval Poet* (London: MPG Books Ltd., 2006), 13.

²⁰ Isba, *Gladstone and Dante*, 5.

²¹ John Ruskin, *Stones of Venice* (London: George Allen, 1856), 87.

second volume of *Modern Painters* the following year, there was scarcely any work by Ruskin without overt or submerged reference to the poet, whether in defense of the paintings of J. M. W. Turner, conversations on mineralogy for schoolgirls, or critiques of political economy.²²

Like his friends Gladstone and Ruskin, British painter William Dyce (1806-1864) paid homage to the poet. He did so, however, with paintings rather than words, producing four perceptive works of art based on episodes in the *Commedia* that span the bulk of his artistic career. During his early years in Edinburgh, the artist portrayed the tragic lovers Paolo and Francesca from the fifth canto of *Inferno* [Fig. 2]; upon his death nearly three decades later he left unfinished a large canvas of Dante and Beatrice from *Paradiso* ascending through Heaven [Fig. 1]. Between these two works Dyce submitted as a design for the Turner Medal Dante's vision of Rachel and Leah from *Purgatorio* XXVII [Fig. 3], the idea for which was inspired by careful reading of Ruskin's third volume of *Modern Painters*. And in 1859, at William Gladstone's invitation, Dyce painted a reformed prostitute in the guise of Beatrice [Fig. 4].

It is the purpose of this thesis to place these four works into their literary, artistic and personal contexts. Specifically, it will be shown that far from assimilating the poet to a pantheon of important worthies, Dyce found in Dante contradictions to his Victorian, Anglican ideals. These contradictions are explicated in each of the four works. The project naturally incorporates discussions of the artist's other works, both literary and artistic, and, as will be shown, inevitably extends to discussions of Gladstone's and Ruskin's own readings of Dante. For while Dyce's life and art are in many ways unique,

²² Alison Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 30.

his internalization of debates which raged during his lifetime—Quattrocento art, nature, religion, ecclesiology or Dante—make him a quintessential Victorian.

State of Research

Although much has been written about the wider theme of Dante in British nineteenth-century art and literature, including works which specifically treat Gladstone's and Ruskin's engagements with the Florentine poet, virtually nothing has been written on William Dyce's four works inspired by the *Commedia*.²³ There are several reasons for this, the most obvious of which is the artist's early death. When the painter died in 1864 at age 57, William Gladstone had yet to serve the first of four terms as Prime Minister; John Ruskin would go on to publish and lecture for more than two decades. Although Dyce enjoyed considerably more fame during his lifetime than today, he would never live to approach the celebrity of many of his contemporaries.

The second reason for a dearth of scholarly interest in the artist has to do with his comparatively small overall production. When Lord John Morley (himself a Dante enthusiast) began his biography of his friend William Gladstone, he had more than a quarter of a million documents at his disposal. Likewise, upon his death, John Ruskin's prolific writings and lectures were compiled and edited into a monumental 39-volume library. Equally vast are the volumes and commentaries about their works. In contrast,

²³ For works on the broad topic of Dante in the nineteenth century, see Nick Havely, ed., *Dante's Modern Afterlife* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), Nick Havely, ed., *Dante in the Nineteenth Century: Reception, Canonicity, Popularization* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), Aida Audeh and Nick Havely, eds., *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Alison Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), and Steve Ellis, *Dante and English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For a work which specifically deals with Gladstone's engagement with Dante see Anne Isba, *Gladstone and Dante: Victorian Statesman, Medieval Poet* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2006). For a work which deals specifically with John Ruskin's engagement with the poet see Chapter 2 of Alison Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians*, 29-44.

although William Dyce left a large amount of correspondence detailing his thoughts on various subjects, he left frustratingly little documentation about individual works of art.

This is especially unfortunate because as an artist, Dyce's recognition lies almost exclusively in his paintings, which are relatively few, rarely dated or exhibited during the artist's lifetime, and uneven in quality.²⁴ The first seven years of Dyce's artistic career were primarily employed executing portraits of the Edinburgh gentry in the style of Raeburn and Lawrence. A further seven years were taken up with work for the Schools of Design, and much time and energy were consumed by pursuits in church music and ecclesiology.²⁵ Moreover, although the painter moved in prestigious circles, he earned a precarious livelihood, only achieving some measure of financial stability towards the end of his career (in 1845 he was obliged to borrow £100 from Gladstone in order to meet living expenses).²⁶ Even when occupied with substantial commissions, the painter still supplemented his income with small easel works, commissioned by his father-in-law, who was at times his only patron. The final years of the artist's life were exhausted decorating the walls of the Queen's robing room in the Palace of Westminster. Although Dyce estimated the project would take him six years, it became a heavy strain that lasted fourteen, with only five of the seven panels completed upon his death.²⁷

The third reason for a lack of scholarly interest in Dyce's works has to do with the artist's posthumous reception which, for the first decades following his death, was yoked

²⁴ Emily Hope Thompson, "The Religious Landscapes of William Dyce," in *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, ed. Jennifer Melville (Aberdeen: Aberdeen City Council, 2006), 52.

²⁵ Olga Ferguson, "Introduction," in *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, ed. Jennifer Melville (Aberdeen: Aberdeen City Council, 2006), 13.

²⁶ James Stirling Dyce, *The Dyce Papers, The Life, Correspondence and Writings of William Dyce, R.A., 1806-64, Painter, Musician and Scholar*, by his son James Stirling Dyce, an unpublished typescript in the archives of Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museum, Chapter XII.

²⁷ Ferguson, *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, 12.

to his final and most important public commission: the fresco decorations in Westminster. Public support for the decoration scheme died long before its completion with the death of its chief patron, the Prince Consort in 1861. The press and Dyce's letters show that continued delays and early deterioration of the frescoes left him vulnerable to accusations by the commissioners.²⁸ In the course of the nineteenth century, Dyce's reputation languished as an artist clearly influenced by, but peripheral to, the Nazarenes and/or the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. His paintings were viewed as "more learned than original, and marked rather by refinement of taste rather than appeal to the feelings."²⁹ The eclipse of Dyce's artistic milieu—never exactly household names to begin with—became almost complete when the full forces of Realism, Impressionism and Symbolism gained the day.

Following decades of inattention, a "corrective" appeared around the turn of the nineteenth century in the form of the Dyce Papers, originally titled *The Life, Correspondence and Writings of William Dyce, R.A., 1806-64, Painter, Musician and Scholar*, by the painter's son James Stirling Dyce. The work is an unpublished typescript of the artist's correspondence, lectures and treatises joined with commentary.³⁰ James Stirling, who was only eleven when his father died, created the work, in part, to vindicate his father's reputation.³¹ As a result, the Dyce Papers are often vague when dealing with

²⁸ James Stirling Dyce, Dyce Papers, XLII.

²⁹ Samuel Redgrave, *Dictionary of Artists of the English School: Painters, Sculptors, Architects, Engravers and Ornamentists: with Notices of their Lives and Work* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1878), 134.

³⁰ A photocopy (the original has been lost) of the Dyce Papers can be found in the archives of Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museum and a microfiche copy is available at the Hyman Krietman Research Centre at the Tate Britain in London. Additionally, a digitized copy, containing the correspondence along with some of the shorter lectures and treatises, was prepared by Dr. Allen Staley and research assistants. The author has made use of all three versions in his research.

³¹ James Stirling Dyce was eager to attribute his father's stylistic evolution to his own perceptions rather than as borrowings from others. This is evidenced from his discussion on his father's burgeoning affinity

artistic matters, especially Dyce's gleanings from other artists and his stylistic development. Moreover, of the four works inspired by Dante treated in this thesis, only *Francesca da Rimini* (1837) [Fig. 2] was known to the artist's son. Nevertheless, this text has many virtues, the most obvious of which is its trove of primary source material by the artist and his correspondents together with exhibition notes, lectures, and published and semi-published works.³²

The next major scholarly work on the artist had to wait more than half a century. In 1963, just prior to the centenary of the artist's death, Allen Staley, a Columbia University professor of eighteenth and nineteenth-century art, published an article on William Dyce's increasing proclivity towards outdoor naturalism.³³ Staley expanded upon the article in the significant book *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*.³⁴ The text contextualizes Dyce's late landscapes—by this time some of his best known and most accessible works—for the relationships between the painter, the younger generation of the Pre-Raphaelites, and John Ruskin. Although none of the four works treated in this thesis is dealt with by Staley, the text provides a lucid discussion on most aspects relevant to the artist's pictures, including the artist's use of photography; his travels to the Continent, Scotland and Wales; *plein air* watercolor painting; and ideas about Quattrocento art.

towards Quattrocento painting: "During this second visit [to Italy] his artistic tendencies gradually underwent a complete change; without the smallest intercourse with the Germans then in Rome and ignorant even of the existence of the new school of Purists, or as he believed they were even then termed Pre-Raffaellites [sic], he began as they did to regard Art exclusively in its most moral and religious aspect, and as a consequence to perceive the great charms of the works of the devout masters of the fifteenth century." James Stirling Dyce, *Dyce Papers*, I.

³² The author is grateful for the generous support of L. Gene and Catherine Lanier Lemon and the Gully Fellowship, which provided funding for studying the Dyce Papers and Dyce's works in museums across Britain.

³³ Allen Staley, "William Dyce and Outdoor Naturalism", *The Burlington Magazine* 105 (1963): 470-477.

³⁴ Allen Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

The first full-scale biographical account of William Dyce was published by Marcia Pointon in 1979. The text makes liberal use of the Dyce Papers as well as exposition notes, Academy minutes and additional correspondence not available to the artist's son. As the author points out in her introduction, the text "is a biography, not simply an art-historical study of William Dyce's achievement in the visual arts."³⁵ Arranged chronologically, the biography expeditiously discusses the artist's works in the context of a broad range of his activities and intellectual tastes including science, choral music, photography, art education, and ecclesiology. All four of the works of art inspired by Dante which comprise the second part of this thesis receive brief mention in Pointon's biography (although she mistakenly identifies Dyce's painting of Dante and Beatrice [Fig. 1] as Dante and Virgil). Regretfully, in explicating the polymath's entire career in a mere 179 pages, Pointon only rarely pauses to consider the implications of the picture which emerges. As a result, Pointon's biography is full of symptoms but short on diagnosis.

In 2006, a major exhibition of the artist's works opened at the Aberdeen Art Gallery marking the bicentenary of his birth. A 200-page exhibition catalogue was published with essays on the artist's life and works, edited by Jennifer Melville.³⁶ Apparently in acknowledgment of Pointon's comprehensive biography, the catalogue opts for discrete essays which highlight the artist's training, religion, family life, fresco and landscape paintings (the latter is highly reminiscent of Staley's works on this subject). The editorial approach allows the greatest depth thus far into of the byways of

³⁵ Marcia Pointon, *William Dyce* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

³⁶ Jennifer Melville, ed., *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen City Council, 2006).

Dyce scholarship, which, since the publication of Pointon's biography, has manifested itself in only a trickle of journal articles and essays.³⁷ Especially pertinent to the present discussion is the catalogue's essay on the artist's training and style by Ann Steed. Additionally, all four of the works discussed in part two of this Master's thesis are illustrated and briefly described in the catalogue.

Methodology

The approach of this Master's thesis is primarily archival and historical. The author has amassed an exhaustive collection of William Dyce's correspondence, published and semi-published texts, and has examined personally a majority of works on several trips to Britain. Since Dyce never mentions Dante in any extant writing, an examination of his paintings is also requisite since they are the chief record of the context in which they were created. In this thesis, Dyce's works are examined against both Dante's original intended meaning and the wider theme of Dante in British nineteenth-century art and literature. Fortunately, both the original context of Dante's works and their nineteenth-century reception have already received considerable scholarly interest.³⁸ The latter naturally include Paget Toynbee's seminal studies on Dante in British art and literature,³⁹ as well as more recent publications such as Ralph Pite's *The Circle of Our*

³⁷ Clare Wilson, "Dyce 'in Camera': New Evidence of His Working Methods," *Burlington Magazine* 132, (1990): 760-765; Lindsay Errington, "Ascetics and Sensualists, William Dyce's Views on Christian Art," *Burlington Magazine* 134, (1983): 491-497; Michaela Giebelhausen, "Holman Hunt, William Dyce and the Image of Christ" in *The Victorian Supernatural*, edited by Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell, 173-196. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³⁸ See note 23 above.

³⁹ Paget Toynbee, "Dante in English Art: A Chronological Record of Representations by English Artists," *The Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Dante Society* 38 (1906): 1-112; Paget Toynbee, *Dante in English Literature from Chaucer to Cary (c. 1380-1844)* (London: Methuen & Co., 1909).

Vision (1994),⁴⁰ Alison Milbank's *Dante and the Victorians* (1998),⁴¹ and Antonella Braida's *Dante and the Romantics* (2004).⁴²

Chapter one of this thesis discusses the intertextual context of *Francesca da Rimini* (1837) [Fig. 2], which results in a palimpsest. It will be shown that similar to contemporary writers such as Leigh Hunt, Dyce undermines Dante by privileging the human rather than divine perspective of the episode. This is done primarily through his inclusion of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Esposizione sopra la Commedia di Dante* (1373-1374) to the exhibition catalogue description which accompanied the painting when it was first exhibited in Edinburgh. Chapter two contends that *Design for the Reverse of the Turner Medal* (1858) [Fig. 3], which illustrates a minor scene from *Purgatorio XXVII* in which Rachel and Leah appear to Dante in a vision, is heavily dependent upon the artist's reading of Ruskin's *Modern Painters III*, rather than its original source. The chapter also discusses the implications for the painter's selection of the episode. Chapter three discusses *Beatrice* (1859) [Fig. 4], a "portrait" of a prostitute commissioned by William Gladstone, in the context of the artist's other portraits of women including his paintings of the Madonna, *Omnia Vanitas* (1848) and *Christabel* (1855). It will be shown that, in truth, the painting presents an image not of Beatrice but of the mixed inclinations of her creator. Chapter three also discusses the melding of religious and art-historical issues in *Dante and Beatrice* (date unknown) [Fig. 1]. The final chapter concludes the thesis with a summary of the major issues from each chapter.

⁴⁰ Ralph Pite, *The Circle of Our Vision* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴¹ Alison Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998).

⁴² Antonella Braida, *Dante and the Romantics* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

A Note on Translations

Ichabod Charles Wright (1795-1871), an accountant and Oxford graduate, published rhyming translations of the three *cantiche* of the *Commedia* between 1833 and 1840.⁴³ It was Wright's 1833 translation of *Inferno* that Dyce quoted in his exhibition catalogue entry for *Francesca da Rimini* (1837) [Fig. 2]. In this Master's thesis Wright's English translation is restricted to the discussion of this painting. Because Dyce read fluent Italian, quotes from the original Italian in his *Design for the Reverse of the Turner Medal* (1856) [Fig. 3], and is known to have owned several Italian copies of the *Commedia*, the original Italian will be used in explicating the remaining three works in this thesis. For added accessibility, English translations of the original Italian are included in parentheses. These are extracted from Henry Francis Cary's (1772-1884) blank verse translations of the *Commedia*, which appeared in installments between 1805 and 1814 and passed through numerous editions during the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ Unlike Wright's translation, Cary's was, by far, the most popular during Dyce's lifetime, and it was primarily through Cary that the nineteenth century grasped the grandness of intricacies of the original.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ichabod Charles Wright, trans., *Dante, Translated into English Verse* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1845). First published in 1840.

⁴⁴ Henry Cary, trans., *The Vision; or, Hell, Purgatorio, and Paradise* (London: Warne, 1956). First published in 1814.

⁴⁵ As evidenced from an auction of the artist's library held on November 22, 1875, Dyce owned an 1831 edition of Cary's *The Vision* comprising all three *cantiche*.

Chapter 2

FRANCESCA DA RIMINI (1837)

This chapter examines *Francesca da Rimini* (1837) [Fig. 2] for cues as to the artist's interpretation of Dante. It is contended that Dyce, like contemporary writers such as Leigh Hunt, attends to Dante's poetry while neglecting his religious beliefs. This is done by weaving Boccaccio's historical narrative, which claims that Paolo had been sent as proxy to win Francesca, into Dante's theological narrative, which weighs the wretched misery of man against the awful majesty of God.⁴⁶ The result is a voyeuristic image of Francesca, which highlights both her vulnerability and her agency.

Canto V of *Inferno*

Inferno begins the night before Good Friday in the year 1300. Dante, assailed by beasts and lost in a dark wood (understood as sin), is unable to find his way. At last rescued by the Roman poet Virgil (70-19 BC), who claims to have been sent by Beatrice, the two traverse the nine tiered circles which descend into Hell. Each circle is inhabited by sinners punished in a *contrappasso*, a symbolic instance of poetic justice, according to their crimes. In the second circle, the first true circle of Hell, Dante encounters lustful souls buffeted ceaselessly by violent winds—a punishment symbolic of the power of lust to blow one about aimlessly. Virgil identifies some of these souls; they include men and women of great renown, including Tristan, Helen, Paris, and Achilles. The pilgrim calls out to a pair to see whether they will speak to him and tell their stories. Francesca da Rimini (c. 1255-1285) responds and relates to Dante how love was her undoing: bound in

⁴⁶ Renato Poggioli, "Tragedy or Romance? A Reading of the Paolo and Francesca Episode in Dante's *Inferno*," *PMLA* 72 (1957): 313-314.

marriage to the deformed Gianciotto Malatesta, lord of Rimini, she fell in love with her husband's younger brother, Paolo. One day, as she and Paolo read the Arthurian legend about the love of Lancelot and Guinevere, each felt the story spoke of their own secret love. When they came to the point in the tale where Lancelot and Guinevere kiss, they could not refrain. The jealous Gianciotto discovered the lovers *in flagrante* and killed them. Henceforth they are doomed to eternity in the second circle of Hell. Overcome with pity at Francesca's tale, Dante collapses as if dead.

Ethos vs. Pathos

Dante's pity for the lovers' plight—which moves him to faint—is not a sign of clemency but of his moral weakness at this stage in his soul's journey. Because the poet records his experiences from Hell and Purgatory after the beatific vision in Paradise, he carries the paradigm of that vision to bear on all previous episodes of the *Commedia*. Thus, Dante's attitude toward Francesca's tale has two facets: that of the moralistic poet who judges and the passionate pilgrim who experiences. To the former, Francesca's tale is but a minor interlude in the sublime comedy of divine order; to the latter, it is a wretched tragedy of human experience.⁴⁷ The poet's carefully conceived *contrappasso* of the second circle, therefore, justly damns the pair to live for eternity as they have sinned: buffeted by forces they did not control in life. Forever undivided in love, they are nevertheless cut off from divine love.⁴⁸ This point is reinforced the first time the reader

⁴⁷ Poggioli, "Tragedy of Romance?," 313.

⁴⁸ Francesca Bugliani-Knox, "Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse: Nineteenth-Century English Translations, Interpretations and Reworkings of Dante's Paolo and Francesca," *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society* 115 (1997): 223. For example, Dante respected his teacher and guardian Brunetto Latini

comes across justice and love referred to together in the *Commedia* in the inscription above Hell's gate:

Justice did first my lofty Maker move;
By Power Almighty was my fabric wrought,
By highest Wisdom, and by Primal Love.⁴⁹

Furthermore, viewed within the context of the *Commedia* as a whole, the corrupt earthly love of Paolo and Francesca serves as foil to the divine love Dante eventually recognizes at the end of his spiritual journey. When Francesca seeks to excuse her sin by relating the story of Lancelot and Guinevere, she tells Dante “but at one point were we vanquished”.⁵⁰ Near the end of his transcendent journey in *Paradiso*, Dante revisits the same phrase to refer to God as the “point that vanquished me”.⁵¹ The poet's purpose in including the episode is unambiguous: if a human soul must be “vanquished” by love, it should be by God alone.⁵²

A Romantic Interpretation

Early Romantics had a selective appreciation of Dante.⁵³ Chiefly drawn to the sublime and the horrific, the hellish punishments of *Inferno*, translated in English for the first time in 1782, became an early obvious choice of authors and artists. Of all the stories presented in the *Inferno*, it was that of Francesca da Rimini that most intrigued the nineteenth century. Although she shares her fate in the second circle of Hell with women

immensely but, nonetheless, felt it requisite to place him in Hell with the sodomites. The squalor of Latini's sin and penalty is, nevertheless, painful for Dante to visualize.

⁴⁹ Dante, *Inferno*, III, 4-6.

⁵⁰ Dante, *Inferno*, V, 132.

⁵¹ Dante, *Paradiso*, XXX, 11.

⁵² Amor is literally replaced by the God of Love. In Beatrice, by contrast, Dante recognizes that divine love is perfectly ordered movement, peace and intellectual light.

⁵³ The vast majority of early English translations comprised the *Inferno* alone or selected parts of the *Inferno* (see note 54 below).

of considerably greater renown including Semiramis, Dido, Cleopatra, and Helen—she is the first to speak to Dante and the only soul in the entire *Commedia* who is asked to retrace the circumstances that led to her damnation. The substance of Francesca's account is graphic and persuasive; her words seduce the ear as the narrative stirs the heart. Dante's pathetic swoon upon hearing her tale becomes one of the most moving episodes in the poem.⁵⁴

Between 1782 and 1836, at least eleven translations of the episode were published either in translations of the whole of the *Commedia*, the *Inferno cantica*, or in free-standing translations of the fifth canto.⁵⁵ In the main, British Romantics admired Francesca for the very reasons that Dante's God condemned her to Hell. Francesca's sin was love, and her punishment was to be embraced forever by her lover. Shelley (1792-1822) wrote from Livorno (1819) in her praise; Lord Byron (1788-1824) from Ravenna (1820), and both quoted from the episode in their own verses. In his sonnet "On a Dream" (1816), Keats (1795-1821) dreamed wistfully of finding himself in Hell, blown eternally in mists in the embrace of a beautiful woman.⁵⁶

The episode received similar treatment by artists. Scenes of the two lovers being observed by Gianciotto were made popular by continental painters such as Jean Auguste Ingres (18 versions from about 1814 to after 1850) [Fig. 5], or drifting on the wind of Hell's second circle, such as those by Ary Scheffer (15 versions between 1822 and 1855). In his seminal indices, Paget Toynbee lists more than fifty British artistic representations

⁵⁴ Poggioli, "Tragedy of Romance?," 313-14.

⁵⁵ Henry Boyd, Henry Francis Cary and Ichabod Charles Wright translated the whole *Commedia*; Charles Rogers (1782), Nathaniel Howard (1807), Joseph Hume (1812) and Edward Shannon (1836, 1-10) translated the *Inferno cantica*. William Parsons (1785); Constantine Jennings (1794); Lord Byron (1820) translated only the episode of Paolo and Francesca.

⁵⁶ Bugliani-Knox, "Galeotto fu il libro," 224.

of this subject.⁵⁷ Fuseli (1776, 1786, 1808), Reynolds (1777), Flaxman (1793), Blake (1824-7), Gallagher (1835), Cope (1837), Lemon (1838) and Westmacott (1838) are among artists who painted or sculpted scenes depicting the episode.

The Story of Rimini (1816)

In 1816, Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) published *The Story of Rimini*, a tale about trusting one's heart, written during his incarceration for libel. Though derived from *Inferno's* fifth canto, *The Story of Rimini* greatly augments the poet's account of the lovers from about seventy lines to more than 1,700. The first of four cantos describes how the Duke of Ravenna wishes to marry his daughter, Francesca, to Duke Giovanni of Rimini. Although the canto ends with a springtime wedding, the marriage is later revealed as dubious, since instead of Giovanni himself being there to marry, the two elder dukes conspired to send his brother Paulo [Paolo] in proxy. In the second canto, Francesca travels to Rimini, where she is kept by Giovanni as a possession and isolated, yet manages to fall in love with Paulo, who secretly harbors love for Francesca. Hunt describes how the pair alternately avoid and seek one another, until the day Francesca seeks repose in a pagan temple. As she reads the Lancelot romance, Paulo enters, and they are overcome:

The world was all forgot, the struggle o'er,
Desperate the joy—That day they read no more.⁵⁸

Tragically, Francesca speaks words while sleeping one night that divulge to Giovanni her adultery with Paulo. The next morning Giovanni murders Paulo in a dramatic duel.

⁵⁷ Toynbee, "Dante in English Art," 1-112.

⁵⁸ Leigh Hunt, *The Story of Rimini* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1816), 43-78.

Francesca, unable to go against the impulses of her heart, dies of grief soon after. The tale, which began with a springtime nuptial pageant, ends on a chilly autumn day with the lovers' funeral cortege.

In contrast to Dante's succinct ethical plot, Hunt treats the lovers' consummated affair as the culmination of a series of torturous, psychological evasions by the two tragic lovers. Often thrown in situations together, they are forced to abide patiently, suppressing their feelings. The adulterous act, which Hunt shows to be rooted in a dubious marriage, is further mitigated by the protagonists' efforts of self-denial in the face of temptation.

Boccaccio's *Esposizioni*

Hunt's poem—especially its addition of a dubious, dynastic marriage, was overwhelmingly influenced by the Renaissance poet and commentator Giovanni Boccaccio's *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante* (1373-1374), a source to which he refers in his preface.⁵⁹ Seventy years after his banishment from his native Florence, there remained high demand for exposition and clarification of Dante's immensely popular works. In 1373, the Florentine commune commissioned Boccaccio, the acknowledged expert on Dante, as exegete. Boccaccio initiated a cycle of performances and lectures on the *Commedia* at the church of Santo Stefano di Badia but only covered only about half of the *Inferno* before his death in 1375.

The *Esposizioni* supplies historical detail to the episode of Paolo and Francesca in a bid to diminish her culpability. Boccaccio tells his readers that Francesca da Rimini (c.

⁵⁹ Hunt would be the first to translate Boccaccio's *Esposizioni* in English since the fifteenth century. In Leigh Hunt, *Stories from the Italian Poets: with Lives of the Writers* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1846).

1255-1285) was the daughter of Guido da Polenta, lord of Ravenna, who had been at war with the Malatesta family. When a peace was negotiated, Guido wished to solidify it by marrying his beautiful daughter to the Malatestan heir, the deformed Giovanni (Gianciotto) Malatesta. Because of this manifest incompatibility, the fathers agreed that Gianciotto's handsome brother Paolo should be sent to Ravenna to marry Francesca by proxy. When a maid pointed to the visiting Paolo through a window, indicating him as Francesca's future husband, Francesca fell in love. She was undeceived only on her honeymoon when she awoke next to Gianciotto.

Although on every other instance Boccaccio adds detail to Dante's poem (even describing in gory detail the lovers' deaths),⁶⁰ he omits the emotional highpoint of Francesca's story as told by Dante: the moment when Paolo and Francesca, reading from the Lancelot romance, come to realize that they love each other—the only moment Dante actually portrays.⁶¹ Francesca tells Dante how she and Paolo read of how Lancelot “to love became a prey”. The reading constrained their faces to pale and their eyes to meet. Finally—when they read of how Lancelot kissed Guinevere—Paolo kissed her. For Dante, the Lancelot romance functions as a *mise en abyme*, where his readers' passions are engaged as they read of passionate readers reading about passion. This stands in direct contrast to Boccaccio's claims that Francesca's adulterous and (by the standards of

⁶⁰ Gianciotto traps the lovers in Francesca's room, which is bolted from within. Francesca goes to open the door, thinking that Paolo has successfully fled through a trapdoor to a room below, not realizing that the fold in his jacket has caught on a piece of iron. Gianciotto runs at Paolo with his rapier, but Francesca places herself between the brothers, and Gianciotto unintentionally kills her while wounding Paolo, whom he then kills. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il commento alla Divina Commedia e gli altri scritti intorno a Dante*, ed. Domenico Guerri (Bari: Laterza & Figli, 1918.), 138.

⁶¹ “Col quale come ella poi si giugnesse, mai non udi' dire se non quello che l'autore ne scrive; il che possibile è che così fosse ma io credo quello essere più tosto fizione formata sopra quello che era possibile ad essere avvenuto, ché io non credo che l'autore sapesse che così fosse.” Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il commentio alla Divina commedia altri scritti intorno a Dante*.” Boccaccio, *Il commento alla Divina Commedia*, 138.

the day) incestuous affair owed to the fact that she had been deceitfully bartered into marriage.

British Literature on Italy

By deliberately incorporating Boccaccio's backstory in which Francesca's romantic inclinations are moderated against the backdrop of her family's maneuvering, *The Story of Rimini* exposes "the whole melancholy absurdity of Dante's theology, in spite of itself, falling to nothing before one genuine impulse of the affections."⁶² The scenario conforms to British views of Italy as a land populated by wily Machiavellis, where anarchy and disorder ruled in the bedroom as well as in the streets.⁶³ Although the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) effectively closed the Continent to English travelers, in the interim Gothic romances such as those by Ann Radcliffe, who had never visited to Italy, rehearsed stock descriptions of Italian characters and settings associated with Arcadian beauty, sensationalism, intrigue, and villainy. When travel to Italy was possible again, visitors fully expected to find what was vividly portrayed through literature, painting, and newly published travel guides.

Such sentimentalized representations were corroborated by nonfiction texts as well. The preface to Ichabod Charles Wright's translation of the *Commedia*, from which William Dyce would derive his quote from canto V in the exhibition catalogue, describes Dante's Italy as "deluged with blood, and her welfare sacrificed to ambition and

⁶² Michael O'Neill, "'Admirable for Conciseness and Vigour': Dante and English Romantic Poetry's Dealings with Epic," in *Dante in the Nineteenth Century. Reception, Canonicity, Popularization*, ed. Nick Havely (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 16.

⁶³ Reed Way Dasenbrock, *Imitating the Italians* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 2.

avarice,”⁶⁴ and a time of “violent family disputes and political schisms which were... carried to an extent not easily imagined.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, Wright avers Dante’s role as epic poet was to “unfold the manifold corruptions of the age in which he lived.”⁶⁶ Such perceptions of Italy as a land of violence and sexuality would dominate English literature and painting until well into the twentieth century.⁶⁷

Francesca da Rimini (1837)

While living in Edinburgh and employed primarily as a portrait painter, William Dyce exhibited his painting of *Francesca da Rimini* [Fig. 2] at the Royal Scottish Academy in 1837. The artist included in the exhibition a description written by Boccaccio, extracted from his *Esposizioni*. Dyce himself acquired the quotation from a footnote in Wright’s 1833 translation of Dante’s *Inferno*, which is also quoted, in part, in the catalogue description:⁶⁸

“Guido da Polenta engaged to give his daughter Francesca in marriage to Gianciotto, the eldest son of his enemy the master of Rimini. Gianciotto, who was hideously deformed, foresaw that if he presented himself in person he would be rejected by the lady. He resolved, therefore, to marry her by proxy and sent, as his representative, his younger brother Paolo, surnamed the Beautiful. Francesca saw Paolo arrive, and being deceived by one of her maids imagined she beheld her future husband. That mistake was the commencement of her passion; and it was not till after her arrival at Rimini that she was undeceived.” Boccaccio

Paolo and Francesca were shortly after assassinated by Gianciotto in a fit of jealousy. The occasion of this (which is the subject of the picture) is thus related by herself, in the Fifth Canto of the “Inferno:”

⁶⁴ Wright, *Dante*, xxii.

⁶⁵ Wright, *Dante*, xiv.

⁶⁶ Wright, *Dante*, xvii.

⁶⁷ One such example is Madame de Staël’s *Corinne ou l’Italie* (1807).

⁶⁸ Ichabod Charles Wright, *Dante, Translated into English Verse* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1845).

“One day it chanced for pastime we were reading,
How Launcelot to love became a prey;
Alone we were—of evil thoughts unheeding.
Our eyes oft met together as we read;
And from our cheeks the colour died away;
But at one passage we were vanquished.
And when we read of him so deep in love,
Kissing at last the smile long time desired,
Then he, who from my side will ne’er remove,
My lips all trembling kissed...

.....
Hell’s lowest depth—Cäina dark and dim,
Awaits our murderer—⁶⁹

In keeping with versions of the episode by other artists—in particular Flaxman, Ingres, and the painter’s friend Nazarene artist Joseph Anton Koch [Fig. 7]—Dyce depicts the psychological moment preceding the murder of Paolo and Francesca as a frozen tableau. Seated on a moonlit balcony, Paolo swoops in on a diffident Francesca for a kiss, while the jealous Gianciotto, weapon in hand, surreptitiously observes them. Francesca’s right hand releases its grip on the fateful book of love poetry in resignation, while her left directs the viewer’s attention towards it. In the background the planet Venus, symbol for the goddess of love, is given prominence both by its location level to the lovers’ heads and its reflection in the Marecchia River. As a final emphasis, a lute leaning against the parapet evokes the pleasures of courtly love with its sensuous and delicate tones. The figure of Gianciotto was cut in 1881 (only his left hand remains on the parapet), while under the ownership of the Royal Scottish Academy.⁷⁰ In the upper

⁶⁹ *RSA Annual Exhibition Catalogue* (1837), quoted in Melville, *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, 104.

⁷⁰ According to Olga Ferguson, upon the artist’s death in 1864 the Academy purchased *Francesca da Rimini*, “a picture which they had reason to believe Mr Dyce thought the principal work he had executed before he left Scotland permanently to reside in England.” In 1881 Scottish painter Noel Paton recommended the painting be reduced in size by cutting away the objectionable part. At this time, the treasurer reported that “considerable portions of the Picture are cracked; a figure of Gianotte (about half of

left corner of the canvas can be seen a charcoal *pentimento* of an earlier version of an enraged Gianciotto standing in profile. Other *pentimenti* indicate that the scene was originally conceived within an arched space.

William Dyce's Employment of Boccaccio's Marriage Narrative

Like Boccaccio and Hunt before him, William Dyce underscores the political explanation of the Francesca episode in a bid for sympathy for its heroine. Although the painting appears at first glance to conform visually to Dante's conventional reading, it is, nevertheless, dependent on Boccaccio's backstory for the artist's intended interpretation: Francesca reads, and by reading she imagines a life for herself different from the realpolitik of dynastic marriage. In selecting the backstory, Dyce is following the example of painter John Rogers Herbert (1810-1890), who exhibited a painting of Francesca five years earlier at the Society of British Artists in 1832 [Fig. 8]. In lieu of any reference whatsoever to Dante, Herbert included in the catalogue inscription lines from canto III of Leigh Hunt's *Story of Rimini*:

Ready she sat with one hand to turn o'er
The leaf to which her thoughts ran on before⁷¹

By accentuating Francesca's psychological motivations which cause her to commit adultery, Herbert moderates Dante's theology. Although Dyce elects to depict the climax of the tale mentioned by Dante, in which the protagonists are murdered, his viewers are equally aware of Francesca's psychology through Boccaccio's description. Dante's theology is further moderated by depicting the moment immediately after the reading,

which is new)... is cracked all over...". From Olga Ferguson, "Francesca da Rimini," in *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, ed. Jennifer Melville (Aberdeen: Aberdeen City Council, 2006), 104-105.

⁷¹ Leigh Hunt *The Story of Rimini*, 76.

while simultaneously depicting a vengeful Malatesta, ready to strike his fatal blows even before Paolo has kissed Francesca's demurely reluctant lips. The result is that Dante's original tale of adultery and eternal punishment becomes bowdlerized, and Paolo's looming kiss a "rapturous consummation in itself".⁷²

Dyce, in following the direction of Romantic writers such as Leigh Hunt, undermines Dante in *Francesca da Rimini* by privileging the human rather than divine perspective of the episode. By integrating Boccaccio's narrative, Dyce's Francesca, unlike Dante's, is both powerless and strong, attracting the viewer's attention with her attempts—ultimately deadly—to negotiate that combination.

⁷² Kathleen Verduin, "Edith Wharton, Adultery, and the Reception of Francesca da Rimini," *Dante Studies*, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society, 122 (2004): 104.

Chapter 3

DESIGN FOR THE REVERSE OF THE TURNER MEDAL (1856)

Turner Bequest

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) was one of the most successful, versatile, and controversial landscape painters of nineteenth-century England. Turner entered the Royal Academy at age fourteen and rapidly gained a reputation as a prolific painter, watercolorist and etcher. He made a fortune depicting local topography, atmospheric renderings of storms, shipwrecks, fires, and breathtaking terrain. The artist died in his home in December 1851, bequeathing some 300 paintings and 30,000 sketches to the nation. His last words were reportedly “the sun is God”.⁷³

Turner’s works elicited strong responses from friends and foes. Respected by many colleagues, the artist concurrently elicited derision from critics for his tendency toward abstraction, rapid brush-strokes, and treatment of light.⁷⁴ An obituary published in the *Art Journal* describes Turner as “the greatest landscape painter of the English school ... or any other—ancient or modern,” but it also acknowledges the strength of feeling dividing his detractors from his admirers and recommends “that the present generation must not sit in judgment upon the genius of Turner. We are too close to his pictures to see them in their right aspect.... It is long before one can sufficiently understand a style of painting altogether new and original, to estimate its merits.”⁷⁵

In March 1856, five years after the artist’s death, the Court of Chancery reached a settlement regarding his will. As part of the settlement, the Royal Academy was awarded

⁷³ For information on Turner’s reception see Sam Smiles, *J. M. W. Turner: the Making of a Modern Artist* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁷⁴ Smiles, *J. M. W. Turner*, 40.

⁷⁵ Alex Dickson, “Obituary Mr. J. M. W. Turner, RA,” *Art Journal* 4 (1852): 46.

the sum of £20,000. The Academy's minutes record that the funds would be used "in conformity with the will of the late J. M. W. Turner" for "a medal to be called 'Turner's medal' be awarded to the best landscape painting at the Biennial Distribution."⁷⁶ In December of the following year, Royal Academy minutes record that William Dyce put forward a design for the obverse of the medal, with a portrait of Turner shown in profile. Academicians were then invited to produce a design for the reverse of the medal, a "composition having reference to the purpose of the premium...It is suggested that the Design need not be elaborate, but should suffice to convey the intended idea." Painters William Mulready (1786-1863), Daniel Maclise (1806-1870), and William Dyce submitted designs for the reverse. Maclise's design⁷⁷ was selected, and an impression of the medal was made and struck shortly afterwards.⁷⁸

Design for the Reverse of the Turner Medal (1856)

In his rejected design [Fig. 3], Dyce depicts the wives of the biblical Jacob: Leah and Rachel. Leah bends to pick irises,⁷⁹ while a nude Rachel, leaning against a stump, gazes at her reflection in a mirror. The scene is taken from *Purgatorio* XXVII. At the end of *Inferno*, Dante and Virgil escape Hell and emerge beneath a starry sky. Before

⁷⁶ "Daniel Maclise RA, Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851-1951," accessed April 6, 2013, http://sculpture.gla.ac.uk/view/person.php?id=msib4_1238775731.

⁷⁷ The design depicts a youthful artist reclining in an Italianate bower holding a palette. In the distance is a town and bay. Three diaphanous females study him from above, framing a zodiacal sunrise.

⁷⁸ "Design for the reverse of the Turner medal, 1858," accessed April 6, 2013, http://www.racollection.org.uk/ixbin/indexplus?_IXSR_=KWHk20Gi9VI&_IXSP_=0&_MREF_=98392&_IXSS=_IXSESSION_%3d2hac0ILaPmi%26%252asform%3d%252fsearch_form%252fallform%26_IXresults_%3dy%26exhibitions%3dtrue%26_IXACTION_%3dquery%26all_fields%3dTURNER%2bMEDAL%26archives%3dtrue%26_IX%252ey%3d0%26books%3dtrue%26_IX%252ex%3d0%26works%3dtrue%26_IXMAXHITS_%3d18%26_IXTRAIL_%3dSearch%2bResults&_IXACTION_=display&_IXSPFX_=templates/full/&_IXTRAIL_=Search+Results.

⁷⁹ In an earlier version of the design at the Fitzwilliam Museum Leah is depicted picking lilies rather than irises

them lies Purgatory, a seven-terraced mountain formed from the volume of earth displaced in the Southern Hemisphere when Lucifer was cast from Heaven. The mountain—high, steep and capped with the Earthly Paradise—forms a symbolic setting for the soul’s painful purgation. As the poets climb the mountain’s seventh terrace, the terrace of the lustful, they traverse a wall of flame. On the other side Dante and Virgil find themselves on the steps of the Earthly Paradise. Unable to travel farther, the sun sets, and the travelers make their beds on the stony steps. Dante dreams in the persona of Jacob, considering his two wives, the daughters of Laban:

Ne l’ora, credo, che de l’oriente,
prima raggiò nel monte Citerea,
che di foco d’amor par sempre ardente,
giovane e bella in sogno mi pareo
donna vedere andar per una landa
cogliendo fiori; e cantando dicea:
“Sappia qualunque il mio nome dimanda
ch’i’ mi son Lia, e vo movendo intorno
le belle mani a farmi una ghirlanda.
Per piacermi a lo specchio, qui m’addorno;
ma mia suora Rachel mai non si smaga
dal suo miraglio, e siede tutto giorno.
Ell’è d’i suoi belli occhi veder vaga
com’io de l’addornarmi con le mani;
lei lo vedere, e me l’ovrare appaga”.

(... About the hour,
As I believe, when Venus from the east
First lighten’d on the mountain, she whose orb
Seems always glowing with the fire of love,
A lady young and beautiful, I dream’d,
Was passing o’er a lea; and, as she came,
Methought I saw her ever and anon
Bending to cull the flowers; and thus she sang:
“Know ye, whoever of my name would ask,
That I am Leah: for my brow to weave
A garland, these fair hands unwearied ply.
To please me at the crystal mirror, here
I deck me. But my sister Rachel, she

Before her glass abides the livelong day,
Her radiant eyes beholding, charm'd no less,
Than I with this delightful task. Her joy
In contemplation, as in labour mine.)⁸⁰

Leah's words in line 108 of the canto, "lei lo vedere, e me l'ovrare appaga" (Her joy / In contemplation, as in labour mine) along with "Purgat XXVII" are inscribed by Dyce at the top of the medal.

Taken on its own, the applicability of the episode to commemorate J. M. W. Turner or landscape painting defies any good explanation. It has been suggested that the design serves as a visual complement to John Ruskin's literary memorial of Turner in Volume III of *Modern Painters*.⁸¹ It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the way in which Ruskin's gloss of Dante's *Purgatorio* XXVII structures Dyce's thinking about art and nature.

Active and Contemplative

Christian exegetical tradition has consistently viewed Rachel as an exemplar of the contemplative life, and Leah as an exemplar of the active life. Contrasting and paired active and contemplative types date to the ancient Greeks, who believed human intelligence operated at two levels: a rudimentary level concerned with doing things, and another level concerned with beholding, contemplating, knowing reality. In the third century the early Christian writer Origen first compared the New Testament figures of Mary and Martha as representing contemplative and active types, respectively.⁸² Because

⁸⁰ Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXVII, 94-108.

⁸¹ Lindsay Errington, "Ascetics and Sensualists, William Dyce's Views on Christian Art," *The Burlington Magazine* 134 (1992), 498.

⁸² In Luke 10: 38-42, Jesus visits the home of the sisters of Lazarus of Bethany, Martha and Mary:

early Christian interpreters saw Jacob as pre-figuring Christ, Jesus' preference for Mary, the contemplative in Luke's account, was seen to parallel Jacob's preference for Rachel, who by virtue of consistency had to represent contemplation as well.⁸³ Rachel and Leah's actual characteristics in the biblical story were almost beside the point.⁸⁴

A Theological Interpretation

Dante's dream of Rachel and Leah is to be understood in connection with two previous dreams during his progress from the gate of Purgatory to the Earthly Paradise. The first dream follows a day of climbing the slopes of the gate to Purgatory. Dante dreams he is grasped by an eagle and carried through the air to the sphere of fire which scorches and awakens him. The poet interprets this dream as a symbolic presentation of the soul's ascent to God through contemplation of his nature.⁸⁵ In Dante's second dream, a misshapen, crooked-eyed woman with impeded speech is transformed by the pilgrim's gaze into a beautiful siren. He nearly falls under the spell of her song until rescued by Virgil, who tears open the siren's clothes, exposing her rotten belly, the stench of which

"Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his work. But Martha cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

⁸³ Jacob was seen to prefigure Christ on account of his dream in Genesis 28:10-19, in which he saw the ladder that connects earth to Heaven, enabling Heaven to come down to earth and earth to rise up to Heaven. This was seen to anticipate Christ's earthly condescension and salvific mission.

⁸⁴ Jacob encounters Laban's younger daughter Rachel tending her father's sheep, and decides to marry her. Laban is willing to give Rachel's hand to Jacob as long as he works seven years for her. On the wedding night, however, Laban switches Leah for Rachel. Later, Laban claims that it is uncustomary to give the younger daughter away in marriage before the older one (Genesis 29:16-30). Laban offers to give Rachel to Jacob in marriage in return for another seven years of work (Genesis 29:27). Jacob accepts the offer and marries Rachel after the week-long celebration of his marriage to Leah.

⁸⁵ Dante, *Purgatorio*, IX, 19-33.

awakens Dante. This second dream shows the fleshly sins which man must overcome before the divine ideal can become incarnate.⁸⁶

The third dream is a synthesis of the first two, for only in identification with the divine is the divine fully revealed.⁸⁷ That Dante the poet wishes Dante the pilgrim not to be taken in by the seeming attractiveness of the active life is revealed by a close reading of the poem. Dante's words "mi pareva...vedere" remind the reader of the preceding dreamed-of woman who seemed good to him—the rotten-bellied, crooked-eyed siren.⁸⁸ The pilgrim's description of Leah as "giovane e bella" also raises a flag since in Genesis the description is bestowed on her more beautiful younger sister Rachel.⁸⁹ Although such undercutting of Leah would seem to tip the balance in support of Rachel, Dante yet offers his readers nothing to explicitly support her selection.⁹⁰

Rather, the message of the third dream is that when the soul is purified there is no real distinction between the active and contemplative life.⁹¹ The question—which is better: active or contemplative, Leah or Rachel?—is the wrong question. Leah admires the phenomenal world as God's creation—nature as revelatory of God; Rachel studies her own reflection not narcissistically but as the beginning of a quest for the divine itself. This is attested by Dante's waking experience which corresponds with his dreamed premonitions. Invigorated, Dante at long last ascends "al volo" the last steps to the

⁸⁶ Dante, *Purgatorio*, XIX, 7-33.

⁸⁷ Susan Blow, *A Study of Dante* (New York; London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1886), 59.

⁸⁸ Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXVII, 97-98.

⁸⁹ Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXVII, 98. See also Genesis 29:17.

⁹⁰ Jayne Blankenship, "Rachel and Leah: Biblical Tradition and the Third Dream of Dante's *Purgatorio*," in *Old Testament Women in Western Literature*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Jan Wojcik (Conway, AR: UCA Press, 1991), 81.

⁹¹ Blow, *A Study of Dante*, 60.

Earthly Paradise. This is as far as his guide Virgil, representing the best which classical pagan culture has to offer, can lead him. Virgil tells him:

Non aspettar mio dir più né mio cenno;
libero, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio,
e fallo fora non fare a suo senno:
per ch'io te sovra te corono e mitrio.

(...Expect no more
Sanction of warning voice or sign from me,
Free of thy own arbitrement to choose,
Discreet, judicious. To distrust thy sense
Were henceforth error. I invest thee then
With crown and mitre, sovereign o'er thyself).⁹²

Released from Purgatory, Dante's soul is at last refined and his eyes are opened, and his third and final dream marks the change. Neither Leah nor Rachel, as shown therein, is sufficient as a way of life. The pilgrim is now ready to meet Matilda, symbol of the sanctified active life, whom Leah prefigures.⁹³ Like Leah, Matilda is singing and gathering flowers (lilies), but unlike Leah she is not adorning herself with them; she is worshipping, at peace. Matilda, in turn, will draw the pilgrim through the rivers Lethe and Eunoe and lead him to his long-awaited Beatrice, who is pre-figured by Rachel. And Beatrice herself, whom Dante thought to be the goal, will then, with St. Bernard's help, lead him on to God.⁹⁴

William Dyce on Turner

William Dyce's perception of Turner was probably favorable. The fact that Dyce put forward two designs for the medal while engrossed in the enormous task of painting

⁹² Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXVII, 139-142.

⁹³ Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXVIII, 47-128.

⁹⁴ Blankenship, "Rachel and Leah," 81.

frescos at Westminster is perhaps some evidence of this. Dyce was not only acquainted with the elder artist's works—profusely exhibited, etched and published during his lifetime—he was acquainted with the artist as well. Dyce's brief stint as a probationer at the Royal Academy overlapped Turner's tenure as a lecturer. Oddly, there is no mention of the artist in Dyce's extant letters, which is somewhat surprising since the two were neighbors. In light of Turner's eccentricities and bouts of depression during his final years, no news is probably good news. In March 1846, William Dyce moved to 4 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. His son tells us that it was here that his father painted a portrait of Turner (which has not survived), who was then living at the further end of the walk with his mistress Sophia Caroline Booth. In 1843, the same year Ruskin published his first volume of *Modern Painters* in defense of Turner, Dyce exhibited a painting of Jessica from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-1598) [Fig. 9]. Although the painting no longer survives, a print bears striking resemblance to Turner's painting of Shylock's lovestruck daughter exhibited in 1830 [Fig. 10].

Modern Painters

Although it is impossible to know precisely Dyce's estimation of Turner, John Ruskin (1819-1900) unquestionably shaped it for the better. Ruskin took great pains to describe Turner's painted world, to examine the flow of water, the massing of clouds or rocks, the growth of trees and plants, the effect of light and the play of colors. Ruskin's championing of Turner's art has received considerable scholarly attention and it is not the

intent of this chapter to review it.⁹⁵ It is sufficient to say that the sheer volume of Ruskin's writings, coupled with the forcefulness and tenacity of his opinions, informed the artist's achievement for many of his contemporaries. Ruskin's approach to Turner was often complex, opaque, and even self-contradictory, but it was authoritative for at least the 1850s and 1860s and remained influential into the 1890s.

Ruskin's key perception, manifested in the first volume of *Modern Painters* in 1843,⁹⁶ was that Turner escaped convention to depict true nature in all its of flux and change.⁹⁷ At its simplest, this was a matter of reminding critics that Turner understood the natural world better than they did. Turner's treatment of light, for example, which critics deprecated as glaring and false, would be better judged by recourse to actual sunlight than to staid academic preconceptions. Similar claims could be mounted to the artist's botanical and geological understandings. Turner, in Ruskin's words, becomes a supreme naturalist whose truth will be revealed when his detractors understand natural phenomena properly.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ See for example George P. Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

⁹⁶ Ruskin originally wanted to title the book *Turner and the Ancients*.

⁹⁷ Joshua C. Taylor, *Nineteenth Century Theories of Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 286.

⁹⁸ "Turner's sense of beauty was perfect ... only that of Keats and Tennyson being comparable with it. And Turner's love of truth was as stern and patient as Dante's" ... "By Shakespeare, humanity was unsealed to you; by Verulam the principles of nature, and by Turner, her aspect ... But of all the three, though not the greatest, Turner was the most unprecedented in his work. Bacon did what Aristotle had attempted; Shakespeare did perfectly what Aeschylus did partially; but none before Turner had lifted the veil from the face of nature." From John Ruskin, *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* (New York: National Library Association, 1854), 95. Accessed April 6, 2013. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23593/23593-h/23593-h.htm>

Ruskin and Dante

By the publication of *Modern Painters* III, revealing the facts of nature had become not merely an artistic desideratum for Ruskin but a philosophical one as well. “The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to *see* something, and tell what it *saw* in a plain way ... To see clearly is poetry, philosophy, and religion, — all in one.”⁹⁹ Like many Victorians, Ruskin sought a way beyond the subject/object and real/ideal chasm opened in the previous century by German idealist philosophy. This attitude registers strongly in his analysis of the grotesque, which he divides into good and bad, noble and ignoble:

...I believe that there is no test of greatness in periods, nations, or men, more sure than the development, among them or in them, of a noble grotesque; and no test of comparative smallness or limitation, of one kind or another, more sure than the absence of grotesque invention, or incapability of understanding it. I think that the central man of all the world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest, is Dante; and in him the grotesque reaches at once the most distinct and the most noble development to which it was ever brought in the human mind.¹⁰⁰

Dante frequently finds a place among Ruskin’s intermedia pantheons of artists and poets. His poems, and their medieval context, literally form bridges between Ruskin’s diverse thinking about art, morality and action.¹⁰¹

Ruskin and *Purgatorio* XXVII

The rise of landscape painting, Ruskin’s second concern in *Modern Painters* III, finds an analogue in Dante’s *Purgatorio*. The author looks to Dante for evidence of how

⁹⁹ Ruskin, *Modern Painters* III (London: George Allen, 1904), 333.

¹⁰⁰ Ruskin, *Stones of Venice* (London: George Allen, 1904), 187.

¹⁰¹ Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians*, 30-31

the medieval mind viewed nature. Ruskin pauses with his reader in Purgatory by a wood facing the Earthly Paradise. On the other side of a brook stands a maiden, singing and gathering flowers. She is Matilda, the type of the active life, as Beatrice is the type of the contemplative life. Ruskin tells us Dante had been prepared for this encounter by his dream of Rachel and Leah, also types of the active and contemplative life:

This vision of Rachel and Leah has been always, and with unquestionable truth, received as a type of the Active and Contemplative life, and as an introduction to the two divisions of the Paradise which Dante is about to enter. Therefore the unwearied spirit of the Countess Matilda is understood to represent the Active life, which forms the felicity of Earth; and the spirit of Beatrice the Contemplative life, which forms the felicity of Heaven. This interpretation appears at first straightforward and certain; but it has missed count of exactly the most important fact in the two passages which we have to explain. Observe: Leah gathers the flowers to decorate *herself* and delights in *her own* Labour. Rachel sits silent, contemplating herself, and delights in *her own* Image. These are the types of the Unglorified Active and Contemplative powers of Man. But Beatrice and Matilda are the same powers, glorified. And how are they glorified? Leah took delight in her own labour ; but Matilda—”*in operibus manuum Tuarum*”—*in God’s labour* : Rachel, in the sight of her own face ; Beatrice, in the sight of *God’s face*.¹⁰²

The point Ruskin stresses is that the sisters are types of the *unglorified* active and contemplative life: Leah took pleasure in her own labor, but Matilda in the works of God; Rachel took pleasure in the sight of her own face, but Beatrice “in the sight of *God’s face*.” Ruskin continues:

The active life which has only the service of man for its end, and therefore gathers flowers.... is indeed happy, but not perfectly so.... But the active life which labours for the more and more discovery of God’s work, is perfectly happy, and is the life of the terrestrial paradise, being a true foretaste of heaven, and beginning on earth, as heaven’s vestibule....¹⁰³ Now, therefore, we see that Dante, as the great prophetic exponent of the heart of the Middle Ages, has, by the lips of the spirit of Matilda, declared

¹⁰² Ruskin, *Modern Painters* III, 278.

¹⁰³ Ruskin, *Modern Painters* III, 278-279.

the mediæval faith,—that all perfect active life was “the expression of man’s delight *in God’s work*;¹⁰⁴

... The reader will, I think, now see, with sufficient distinctness, why I called this passage the most important, for our present purposes, in the whole circle of poetry. For it contains the first great confession of the discovery by the human race (I mean as a matter of experience, not of revelation), that their happiness was not in themselves, and that their labour was not to have their own service as its chief end. It embodies in a few syllables the *sealing* difference between the Greek and the mediæval, in that the former sought the flower and herb for his own uses, the latter for God’s honour; the former, primarily and on principle, contemplated his own beauty and the workings of his own mind, and the latter, primarily and on principle, contemplated Christ’s beauty and the working of the mind of Christ.¹⁰⁵

William Dyce’s Interpretation

Just as Ruskin’s reader pauses with Dante in the wood facing the Earthly Paradise, the imagined viewer of Dyce’s design occupies the same role, seemingly about to make his choice. Leah, who gathers flowers and draws satisfaction from seeing herself adorned with her own handiwork, “Per piacermi a lo specchio, qui m’addorno” (To please me at the crystal mirror, here I deck me) represents the phenomenal world. Rachel, who stares at her own reflection, reflects the artist’s idealist, imaginative responsibilities: “mai non si smaga / dal suo miraglio” (...she / Before her glass abides the livelong day). Just as Dante would not have to choose between the two, neither does the landscapist. Both the active and contemplative casts of mind are required to see the world with discernment and to share that understanding with others.

Significantly, Dyce’s drawing deviates from Dante’s poem in that Leah does not gaze at a mirror but at the flowers she is about to collect; she, nevertheless, admires the phenomenal world as God’s creation. The result is a design which encapsulates Ruskin’s

¹⁰⁴ Ruskin, *Modern Painters* III, 279.

¹⁰⁵ Ruskin, *Modern Painters* III, 280.

defense of Turner to his critics. Turner was free from the demands of resemblance because his imagination was able to incorporate profound lessons from external nature. For both Dyce and Ruskin then, the true landscapist evokes the majesty of nature without being tied to the facile literalism of a more mundane act of representation.

Chapter 4

BEATRICE (1859) AND *DANTE AND BEATRICE*

This chapter begins with a discussion of the painting commissioned by William Gladstone known as *Beatrice (Lady with a Coronet of Jasmine)* (1859) [Fig. 4]. It will be shown that, although the work was probably not intended to depict Dante's muse, it is, nevertheless, dependent on Gladstone's readings of the *Paradiso cantica*. This sets the painting apart from contemporary Victorian depictions of Beatrice which privilege her depiction by Dante in *Vita nuova*. Following the discussion of Gladstone's commission this chapter moves to a discussion of Dyce's painting *Dante and Beatrice* [Fig. 1]. The painter's critical engagement with *Paradiso* and its author is elucidated in order to shed light on some of the artist's most significant paintings and artistic trends.

Vita nuova and the Idea of Beatrice

As remarked in the introduction, the real-life relationship between Dante and Beatrice had almost no personal basis; the poet was satisfied with the idealized relationship he created through his writing. Of his first meeting with Beatrice at age nine he tells his reader "Ella non pareva figliuola d'uomo mortale, ma di Deo".¹⁰⁶ An image of Beatrice, "la gloriosa donna della mia mente" was fashioned in Dante's early collection of love poems, the *Vita nuova*, written following her death by superimposing Platonic idealism and Christian love on the amorous base of *stil novo*¹⁰⁷ poetry. No longer a sweetheart or even a noble Florentine lady—in death Beatrice is transformed into a pure,

¹⁰⁶ Dante, *Vita nuova* II. Quoted from Homer in the *Iliad* XXIV: "Οὐδὲ ἔφκει / Ἄνδρός γε θνητοῦ παῖς ἔμμεναι, ἀλλὰ θεοῖο."

¹⁰⁷ See note 3.

saintly woman in an intimate relationship with a sinful, mortal man in need of correction.¹⁰⁸

Beatrice in the *Commedia*

Though suggested in *Vita nuova*, Beatrice's role as savior and the instrument of God's grace is made explicit in the *Commedia*. In the second canto of *Inferno* Virgil reveals to Dante that he has been sent to him by Beatrice through the mediation of God's grace. It is not until the closing cantos of *Purgatorio*, however, that Dante reunites with his heroine face to face. Soon after his vision of Rachel and Leah on the summit of Mount Purgatory, Dante is ready to regain the Earthly Paradise.¹⁰⁹ Here he witnesses a majestic procession of elders, angels and women who represent God's revelation. These flank a chariot, drawn by a griffin, who represents the conjoined divinity and humanity of Christ. On the chariot rides Beatrice. Unexpectedly, her first act in this grand reunion is to reprimand Dante.¹¹⁰ To the observing angels she justifies her crossness by telling them of Dante's desertion of her after her death ten years previously.¹¹¹ His subsequent contrition comprises the vision Beatrice demands: although he has ascended through Purgatory and passed through refining fire, Dante, nevertheless, sees his faults more clearly by looking intently at her. Towards the end of his transcendent journey in

¹⁰⁸ Anne Isba, *Dante and Gladstone: Victorian Statesman, Medieval Poet* (London: MPG Books Ltd., 2006), 67. This christological relationship is reflected even in Beatrice's name, signifying "she who makes blessed". It is also reflected in Dante's associating her with the number nine (the square root of which represents three or the Trinity), and in her friendship with the lady Giovanna, who precedes Beatrice on her encounter with the poet on the street just as John the Baptist preceded Christ. When Beatrice finally greets (*salute* in Italian) Dante in *Vita Nuova*, it represents his literal salvation (also *salute*).

¹⁰⁹ In *Purgatorio*, XXVII, 140, Virgil describes him as "libro, dritto e sano è tuo arbitrio.

¹¹⁰ Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXXII 7-9.

¹¹¹ Beatrice died in 1290 when Dante was about 25; the events of the *Commedia* are depicted as taking place around Easter 1300, though Dante wrote the poem between c. 1309 and 1321.

Paradiso, this gradual enhancement of vision allows Dante to see in Beatrice the “*isplendor di viva luce eterna*”, thus recognizing through her a manifestation of divine love.¹¹²

Nineteenth Century Admirers

Like Dante, the Romantics frequently conceived of woman as an instrument of man’s salvation, and *Vita nuova* found its first appreciative readers among their numbers. Margaret in Goethe’s *Faust* (1808) and Emilia in Shelley’s *Epipsychidion* (1821) are transparent complements to Beatrice. In 1830 Arthur Hallam published his tribute to Beatrice, *A Farewell to the South* (1830), and began a translation of *Vita nuova* left unpublished upon his death. Through Tennyson’s *In memoriam*, Hallam’s theological Dantism—the integration of the longing of the soul for divine splendor and desire aroused by beauty—descended as an influential inheritance to Victorians, especially, as will be shown, to his Eton friend and classmate William Gladstone.¹¹³

Following the 1840 discovery of what was believed to be Dante’s youthful portrait by Giotto in the Bargello Chapel in Florence [Fig. 11], Dante began to be viewed as not simply the “Promethean” writer of the *Commedia* but as the young lover of beautiful, virtuous Beatrice.¹¹⁴ This youthful Dante fueled Victorian interest in the poet’s *Vita nuova* and especially its muse.¹¹⁵ By mid-century, Beatrice’s popularity spread to a wider reception following translations of *Vita nuova* into English by Dante Gabriel

¹¹² Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXXI, 131.

¹¹³ Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians*, 105.

¹¹⁴ Seymour Kirkup hypothesized in a letter to Gabriele Rossetti that a parchment book under the figure’s arm is a copy of the *Vita nuova*. See Steve Ellis, *Dante and English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 104. E. H. Gombrich doubts however the attribution of the portrait as Dante in his article “Giotto’s Portrait of Dante?” *The Burlington Magazine* 121 (1979): 471-483.

¹¹⁵ Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians*, 4.

Rossetti (1861), and Theodore Martin (1862).¹¹⁶ Mediated through her depiction in *Vita nuova*, the emotions, values and feelings of artists and writers towards Beatrice were projected in myriad novels, poems, plays, photographs and paintings.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

In privileging the *Vita nuova* over the *Commedia*, the Victorians were privileging a secular, Romantic Beatrice over the Christian, universal heroine envisaged by Dante. The works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1829-1882) are perhaps the most famous examples of this secularizing and particularizing disposition. For Rossetti, all roads lead back to the *Vita nuova*.¹¹⁷ In all his prolific literary and artistic output based on Dante, Rossetti painted only one subject from *Inferno* and none from *Paradiso*. The vast majority of his Dantean works derive exclusively from *Vita nuova* or the various *belle donne* which inhabit *Purgatorio*.¹¹⁸ The genius who wrote the *Commedia* and *Monarchia* remains for Rossetti and many of his contemporaries the man who shut himself up in his room and wept for a year over his lover's death. By separating Beatrice from the Christian ideology found in the supreme standards of the *Commedia*, she becomes not a vehicle of a divine love but a substitute for it. As Steve Ellis has stated:

[Rossetti's] Beatrice is the abnegation ... of the whole pattern of Dante's career and beliefs. Dante was careful not to allow Beatrice to become an absolute value and to reset her in the *Commedia* within the context of a Christian belief that allows her a substantial but ultimately secondary role:

¹¹⁶ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, trans., *The Early Italian Poets from Ciullo d'Alcamo to Dante Alighieri (1100-1200-1300): in the Original Metres, Together with Dante's Vita nuova* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1861). Theodore Martin, trans., *The Vita nuova of Dante* (London: Kessinger Publishing, 1862).

¹¹⁷ Ellis, *Dante and English Poetry*, 113.

¹¹⁸ Ellis, *Dante and English Poetry*, 113.

it is a vision of God's glory that the poems ends and not, as in the *Vita nuova*, of "la Gloria de la sua donna, cioè di quella benedetta Beatrice".¹¹⁹

Beatrice (1859)

In direct contrast to Rossetti and the vast majority of his contemporaries, William Ewart Gladstone's preferred work by Dante was *Paradiso*, the work which leaves no doubt as to Beatrice's heavenly destiny.¹²⁰ The identity of the sitter for his painting titled *Beatrice* (1859) [Fig. 4], originally titled *Lady with a Coronet of Jasmine*, was unknown until the publication of volume V of *The Gladstone Diaries* in 1978.¹²¹ It is now known that Dyce was asked to use as model a prostitute, Maria Summerhayes, whom Gladstone had met on July 30, 1859. A passionate rescuer of prostitutes, there are more entries in Gladstone's diaries about fallen women than there are about the *grandes dames* of polite Victorian society. First directed to rescue work through membership in The Engagement, a group of friends within the Oxford movement who came together in 1844, the rescue work became a colossal charitable enterprise for Gladstone, costing an estimated £80,000 over the next forty years.¹²² According to his diaries, Summerhayes was "Full in the highest degree both of interest and beauty... Altogether she is no common specimen of womanhood!"¹²³ Less than a week after meeting her he commissioned Dyce to paint her portrait. Engaged with the decoration of the Robing Room frescoes, Dyce resorted to

¹¹⁹ Ellis, *Dante and English Poetry*, 131.

¹²⁰ John Morey, Gladstone's biographer, stressed that Gladstone's lifelong enthusiasm for Dante "was something very different from casual dilettantism or the accident of a scholar's taste... it was in Dante—active politician... as well as poet—that he found this unity of thought and coherence of life, not only illuminated by a sublime imagination, but directly associated with theology, philosophy, politics, history, sentiment, duty." In John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* vol. I (Michigan: University of Michigan Library, 1903), 124.

¹²¹ M. R. D. Foot and H. C. G. Matthew, eds., *The Gladstone Diaries* vol. V 1855-1860 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

¹²² Isba, *Gladstone and Women* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 100-105.

¹²³ Foot and Matthew, eds., *Gladstone Diaries*, ix.

painting Summerhayes from a photograph, suggesting to Gladstone: “If I like your subject, which I have no doubt will be the case, some progress in the meantime might be made by having some photographic studies made from her.”¹²⁴ Accordingly, Dyce and Summerhayes visited Gladstone at his home in Hawarden on August 5. Following the commission, Gladstone continued to be obsessed by Summerhayes. “My thoughts of S require to be limited and purged”, he warned himself on September 1. His self-counsel evidently failed to prevent spending four and a half hours declaiming Tennyson’s *Princess* to Summerhayes two weeks later, after which he was “much and variously moved”.¹²⁵ In June 1875, Gladstone sold the painting at auction for £420. Ten years later he destroyed correspondence sent from Summerhayes and another courtesan.¹²⁶

Stylistically, the painting is an amalgamation of two of Dyce’s earlier paintings: *Omnia Vanitas* (1848) [Fig. 12] and *Christabel* (1855) [Fig. 13]. With its chaste dress and static pose, *Beatrice* is plainly reminiscent of the latter, which is based on a poem of the same name by the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, which tells the story of the virtuous Christabel’s encounter with a stranger named Geraldine, who claimed to have been abducted from her home by a band of men. Dyce depicts the part of the poem where Christabel enters the woods to pray before a large oak tree. Upon hearing a noise she discovers Geraldine. In both *Beatrice* and *Christabel*, Dyce has idealized and simplified contours, as the necks on both form vertical lines which pass directly through the center of each painting. However, the pronounced *chiaroscuro* of *Beatrice* which highlights the sitter’s individual physiognomic features is entirely absent in *Christabel*.

¹²⁴ James Stirling Dyce, *Dyce Papers*, Chapter XXXIX.

¹²⁵ Isba, *Dante and Women*, 112-113.

¹²⁶ Isba, *Dante and Women*, 114.

This *chiaroscuro*, which shades half of Summerhayes' face and casts a shadow from her eyelash, is clearly the result of working from a photograph.

Beatrice also bears relation to *Omnia Vanitas* (1848) [Fig. 12], arguably the artist's only deliberately eroticized painting and the diploma work for which he won full membership in the Royal Academy. Inscribed on the original frame are the words "A Magdalen", indicating an intentional contemporary element to the subject.¹²⁷ Despite the timeless dress, the painting shares with *Beatrice* a strong contemporary feel as evidenced by the subject's parted and ironed hair, as was typically worn in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although loosened, the model's hair, like Summerhayes, has distinct waves left by plaiting. Stylistically, however, *Beatrice* owes more to *Quattrocento* painters than to painters such as Titian or Dolci who clearly influenced the style of *Omnia Vanitas*.

In Dyce's portrait of Summerhayes, she wears a white mantle over a red dress. On her head is a wreath of jasmine. Curiously, jasmine is never mentioned by Dante in any of his works, nor does this specific color/clothing combination appear in any of the poet's descriptions of Beatrice. In Dante's first encounter with her recounted in *Vita nuova*, eight-year-old Bice is dressed in "sanguigno, cinta e ornata" (in crimson, tied and adorned).¹²⁸ Nine years later she appears to the poet on the Lungarno "vestita di colore bianchissimo" (dressed in the whitest of white), attended by women dressed in red and green.¹²⁹ As a figure in his dream she appears "nuda, salvo...in uno drappo sanguigno

¹²⁷ Melville, *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, 140.

¹²⁸ Dante, *Vita nuova* II.

¹²⁹ Dante, *Vita nuova* III.

leggeramente” (naked except...covered lightly with a crimson cloth).¹³⁰ “Sanguigne” is the color in which she makes her final appearance in *Vita nuova*, in a vision of “questa gloriosa Beatrice” who rekindles his grief for her death.¹³¹ In the *Commedia*, Beatrice manifests herself to Dante on the summit of Mount Purgatory

sovra candido vel cinta d’uliva
donna m’apparve, sotto verde manto
vestita di color di fiamma viva.

(... in white veil with olive wreath’d,
A virgin in my view appear’d, beneath
Green mantle, rob’d in hue of living flame:)¹³²

An example of a faithful depiction of Beatrice according to the poet’s narrative in *Purgatorio* XXX can be seen in Dyce’s *Dante and Beatrice* [Fig. 1]. The white, green and *fiamma viva* worn by Beatrice—representing the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity respectively—are seen in their proper order. Beatrice is crowned with an olive branch, what Dante calls the “fronde di Minerva” representing wisdom.¹³³ Her white veil is now drawn back from her face to show her green mantle over a robe of fiery yellow.

Jasmine

In addition to the variance in her dress, in her portrait Summerhayes also differs from the poet’s description of Beatrice in that she wears a wreath of jasmine. In combination with roses and lilies, which have longer iconographic histories in Western art, jasmine appears periodically in Renaissance

¹³⁰ Dante, *Vita nuova* III.

¹³¹ Dante, *Vita nuova* XXXIX.

¹³² Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXX, 31-33.

¹³³ Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXX, 68.

representations of the Madonna because of its white color and sweet scent. For example, in paintings by Rosselli and Botticelli, attendant angels offer jasmine to the infant Christ or are wreathed with crowns as a symbol of divine love [Fig. 14].¹³⁴ Because Dyce has painted only three blossoms on the coronet, they could plausibly represent godliness as the number three relates to the Trinity. As aficionados of Renaissance art, both Gladstone and Dyce would have been mindful of the flower's traditional representations.

In Victorian floriography, jasmine carries a multitude of meanings suitable for an elevated female subject including purity, grace and amiability. Admittedly, the specific reason or reasons why Gladstone chose to have Summerhayes depicted with jasmine may never be recuperated. The reason may not even be visual but olfactory, since perfumes at the time were frequently made of flowers such as rose and jasmine. The scent of jasmine could even allude to Summerhayes's profession or to her evening meetings with Gladstone since the scent of jasmine is most potent at night. Whatever its emblematic meaning, the artistic treatment by Dyce, in which the fineness of the stems, leaves and petals are underscored, imparts a sense of fragility which complements the delicacy and femininity of its bearer.

Dyce would not be the first British painter to change Beatrice's iconic appearance. William Blake's *Beatrice Addressing Dante from the Car* (1824-1827) [Fig. 15] depicts the heroine wearing multicolored robes and a gold crown rather than an olive wreath. However, with all the dissimilarities from Dante's

¹³⁴ George Wells Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1954), 33.

descriptions, it is doubtful that the painting for which Summerhayes sat was explicitly intended to depict Beatrice. Originally titled *Lady with a Coronet of Jasmine*, the painting only later took the identity of Beatrice based upon its patron's well-known obsession with Dante and a description five years after its completion in which a Dante scholar in Florence wrote to the artist that the model was 'a perfect Florentine type'. The artist had, the scholar maintained, used the same hair decoration as that used by Botticelli, a "touch that adds beauty to the picture. I like this one better than any of the many Beatrices I have seen."¹³⁵ Although the identification of the painting with Beatrice is probably mistaken, it will be shown that its reception is still dependent on Gladstone's readings of Dante.

Gladstone and Courtly Love

According to Gladstone's biographer John Morley, in *Paradiso* Gladstone "saw in beams of crystal radiance the ideal of the unity of the religious mind, the love and admiration for the high-unseen things of which the Christian church was to him the sovereign embodiment."¹³⁶ The idea that a woman should watch with particular care over an individual living the hard and perilous earthly life gave to the third *cantica* an attractive note of humanity to Gladstone. As Anne Isba discusses in *Gladstone and Dante*, the *Commedia* and its medieval context literally structured Gladstone's thinking about women and morality. Like Dante, Gladstone believed virtuous young women provided a means of salvation for his own morally inadequate self with a conviction that

¹³⁵ Pointon, William Dyce, 166.

¹³⁶ Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, vol. I, 203.

echoed the tradition of courtly love.¹³⁷ In this tradition, the male lover is overwhelmed by yearning for physical or emotional gratification, and yet in reality this yearning should never be allayed. The venerated person or image is a woman whose very existence in the poet's life has an ennobling and exhilarating effect. She is not one among many, but absolutely unique—the best and most beautiful of all women.

Gladstone and Beatrice

In trying to help fallen women like Summerhayes, Gladstone saw himself as a medieval knight, attempting to save damsels in distress from the dragon of male lust.¹³⁸ By painting her portrait clothed with symbols of purity normally reserved for sainted women, one can argue that Gladstone is “saving” Summerhayes by making a comparison of her physical beauty with the beauty of her Christian soul. One of Beatrice's most endearing characteristics, as she and Dante approach the highest sphere of heaven, is that she becomes increasingly beautiful, and it is through descriptions of her physical attractiveness that Dante tries to convey the beauty of her soul.¹³⁹ In *Paradiso* the poet receives ever increasing strength for looking at what is beyond the power of natural vision, by the influence of the beauty of his heavenly lady. Likewise, Gladstone deliberately sought out as rescue cases prostitutes like Summerhayes who were young and pretty. Fellow Liberal Henry Labouchère, the MP for Northampton complained

¹³⁷ Isba, *Gladstone and Dante*, 66.

¹³⁸ Isba, *Gladstone and Women*, 121.

¹³⁹ Except for these encomia for her beauty, little else is said about Beatrice's physical appearance. The poet's rare physical descriptions occur only after copious descriptions of the beauty of her soul. The poet tells his readers her eyes were greenish: it was from “smeraldi ond' Amor gia ti trasse le sue armi” (*Purgatorio*, XXXI, 116-117). Dante's readers learn nothing of her height or even her hair color.

Gladstone manages to combine his missionary meddling with a keen appreciation of a pretty face. He has never been known to rescue any of our East End whores, nor for that matter is it easy to contemplate his rescuing an ugly woman and I am quite sure his conception of the Magdalen is of incomparable example of pulchritude with a superb figure and carriage.¹⁴⁰

Importantly, In Dante's writings, Beatrice, though beautiful, is never allowed to become an object of lust. She was eight and Dante nine when he first fell in love with her; in *Vita nuova* her brief adulthood takes place behind a screen of protective women who follow her wherever she goes. For Dante, her untimely death enshrines her purity.¹⁴¹

By emphasizing her saintliness, however, it is important to note that Dante is also acknowledging his own human frailty. Following her death, Dante transforms Beatrice into a wise teacher in the *Commedia*, where her first act is to scold him in Purgatory for having lost his way since her death. She thus becomes the older, wiser, saintly woman in an intimate relationship with mortal, sinful man in need of correction. Both Dante and Gladstone were comfortable with this balance of power.¹⁴² In his intimate relationships with women, especially his sister Anne who died in 1829 and in his wife Catherine, Gladstone's diary entries indicate that he consistently found in them the more moral beings, he the great sinner.

Ironically, Gladstone's chivalrous work to redeem fallen women like Summerhayes often put his sense of unworthiness before women in sharper relief. He wrote in his diary of his distress over the small success rate of his rescue work and, more

¹⁴⁰ Richard Deacon, *The Private Life of Mr Gladstone* (London: 1965), 49. Quoted in Isba, *Gladstone and Women*, 115. Isba notes that to choose prostitutes who were presentable as well as young was also common sense because they stood a better chance of being reintroduced into respectable society.

¹⁴¹ Lynne Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 54. In 1287 Beatrice marries the banker Simone dei Bardi and dies three years later. Dante completely glosses over her marriage in his poetry.

¹⁴² Isba, *Gladstone and Dante*, 65.

importantly, candidly questioned whether his own carnal response to the prostitutes with whom he engaged served in any way to invalidate his works of charity:

This morning I lay awake until four with a sad and perplexing subject: it was reflecting on and counting up the numbers of those unhappy beings, not present to my memory, with whom during no so many years I have conversed indoors and out. I reckoned from eighty to ninety. Among these there is but one of whom I know that the miserable life has been abandoned and that I can fairly join that fact with influence of mine. Yet this were much more than enough for all the labour and the time, had it been purely spent on my part. But the case is far otherwise: and though in none of these instances have I not spoken good words, yet so bewildered have I been that they constitute the chief burden of my soul.¹⁴³

According to Anne Isba

There seems little doubt that, while Gladstone succeeded in resisting the charms of his rescue cases (in that he did not succumb to them physically at the time), some encounters generated in him a powerful erotic response which he either managed to subdue, or else punished himself for later, and in private.¹⁴⁴

Since Gladstone felt that the greater the sexual temptation presented to him, the greater his virtue in resisting that temptation, the portrait of Summerhayes could, therefore, serve as both titillation and self-denial. It could be for this reason that Summerhayes is painted with alluring lips redder than any Dyce ever painted, yet with medieval and Renaissance attributes that literally enshrine her in virtue. Resting in a space that is undefined, she is a ghostly signifier that Gladstone cannot ever possess in reality.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ William Gladstone, *Diaries* vol. IV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968-94), 586. Quoted in Isba, *Gladstone and Women*, 118-119.

¹⁴⁴ Isba, *Gladstone and Women*, 119.

¹⁴⁵ Pearce, *Woman/Image/Text*, 55.

Beatrice and Dante

Another subjective conception of Beatrice is portrayed by Dyce's *Beatrice and Dante* [Fig. 1]. In the large painting, which has been cropped to fit its slip, Beatrice guides the way as the two ascend to the next sphere of Paradise.¹⁴⁶ Dyce visually reinforces the action by choosing a Baroque composition which focuses on the diagonal movement of the figures.¹⁴⁷ Though unfinished, the profile of Dante's face is that of the iconic Torrigiani death mask. The poet wears dense, medieval dress which contrasts sharply with Beatrice's billowing silken draperies and exposed arms. Both figures are crowned with olive branches symbolic of wisdom.

Vision in Paradiso

The scene depicted is that of the enlargement of Dante's visionary power in *Paradiso*, rendered spatially by his movement from sphere to sphere. This enlargement is a process that encompasses all three *canticas* of the *Commedia*—the superlative example of vision poetry—a convention widely used in literature from late Latin times until the Renaissance. In the poem Dante is provided divine guidance by Virgil, Beatrice and finally St. Bernard from the first canto of *Inferno* to the closing cantos of *Paradiso*, when he at last sees God. Although visionary experience extends through the entire *Commedia*, it is the dominant theme in *Paradiso*. Dante's progress through Hell and Purgatory is marked spatially by following Virgil ("Allor si mosse, ed io li tenni dietro").¹⁴⁸ In Paradise, with Beatrice as his guide and where the ultimate goal is to look

¹⁴⁶ Ferguson, *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, 178.

¹⁴⁷ Ferguson, *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, 178.

¹⁴⁸ Dante, *Inferno*, I, 136.

on the face of God, the pilgrim's journey is marked visually. The beginning of Dante's rapturous ascent through the ten spheres of Paradise occurs when he looks upon Beatrice's eyes. Like a priestess of Helios, she stands staring at the Sun:

Fatto avea di là mane e di qua sera
tal foce, e quasi tutto era là bianco
quello emisperio, e l'altra parte nera,
quando Beatrice in sul sinistro fianco
vidi rivolta e riguardar nel sole:
aquila sì non li s'affisse unquanco.
E sì come secondo raggio suole
uscir del primo e risalire in suso,
pur come pelegrin che tornar vuole,
così de l'atto suo, per li occhi infuso
ne l'immagine mia, il mio si fece,
e fissi li occhi al sole oltre nostr'uso.
Molto è licito là, che qui non lece
a le nostre virtù, mercé del loco
fatto per proprio de l'umana spece.
Io nol sofferarsi molto, né sì poco,
com'ferro che bogliente esce del foco;
e di sùbito parve giorno a giorno
essere aggiunto, come quei che puote
avesse il ciel d'un altro sole addorno.
Beatrice tutta ne l'eterno rote
fissa con li occhi stava; e io in lei
le luci fissi, di là sù rimote.

(Here eve was by almost such passage made;
And whiteness had o'erspread that hemisphere,
Blackness the other part; when to the left
I saw Beatrice turn'd, and on the sun
Gazing, as never eagle fix'd his ken.
As from the first a second beam is wont
To issue, and reflected upwards rise,
E'en as a pilgrim bent on his return,
So of her act, that through the eyesight pass'd
Into my fancy, mine was form'd; and straight,
Beyond our mortal wont, I fix'd mine eyes
Upon the sun. Much is allowed us there,
That here exceeds our pow'r; thanks to the place
Made for the dwelling of the human kind
I suffer'd it not long, and yet so long

That I beheld it bick'ring sparks around,
 As iron that comes boiling from the fire.
 And suddenly upon the day appear'd
 A day new-ris'n, as he, who hath the power,
 Had with another sun bedeck'd the sky.
 Her eyes fast fix'd on the eternal wheels,
 Beatrice stood unmov'd; and I with ken
 Fix'd upon her, from upward gaze remov'd)¹⁴⁹

Under the influence of Beatrice's example, Dante also tries to stare at the Sun. But his eyes soon tire and he looks instead at her eyes, receiving the Sun's reflected light. In these verses, sunlight combines with the language of love poetry to confirm Beatrice's role in the pilgrim's journey of understanding through the spheres of Heaven. Furthermore, since the Sun in Dante's Thomistic cosmology is a symbol for divine light, the act of seeing is a symbol for looking towards God.¹⁵⁰ Beatrice, then, with her gaze directed at God, is the source of the poet's enlargement of vision.

Increasing light and descriptions of Beatrice's beauty literally impel the poet to each new sphere of Heaven. Dante's arrival in the third sphere, the sphere of Venus, is not marked by movement but rather by the perception that Beatrice is increasing in beauty:

Io non m'accorsi del salire in ella;
 ma d'esservi entro mi fé assai fede
 la donna mia ch'i' vidi far più bella.

(I was not ware that I was wafted up
 Into its orb; but the new loveliness
 That grac'd my lady, gave me ample proof
 That we had entered there....)¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Dante, *Paradiso*, I, 43-66.

¹⁵⁰ According to Thomas Aquinas (1225/7-1274), the Earth is stationary at the center of the cosmos, surrounded by nine celestial spheres. From God light descends through the spheres down to Earth.

¹⁵¹ Dante, *Paradiso*, VIII, 13-15.

This theophany of Beatrice's vision and beauty grows as her eyes propel the pilgrim from sphere to sphere, until she must remind him "Volgiti e ascolta; / ché non pur ne' miei occhi è paradiso." ("Turn thee, and list / These eyes are not thy only Paradise").¹⁵² The poet's transition to the final sphere, the Empyrean, requires yet more augmentation of his vision. The initial image first appears as a "lume in forma di rivera" shedding sparks of flame into the flowers that grow along its banks.¹⁵³ Beatrice instructs the poet to bathe his eyes in this stream and as he does so he sees the courts of Heaven in a form of a rose. As Beatrice now takes her place in the rose, she is transformed in his eyes more beautiful than ever before, and Dante becomes enveloped in light, rendering him at last fit to see God.¹⁵⁴ Though his vision is perfected, the poet struggles with the powers of expression. God is conveyed through the complex image of the Trinity, described as large circles occupying the same space within which is the human form of Christ. The *Commedia* ends with Dante trying to understand how the circles fit together, and how the humanity of Christ relates to the divinity of the Son of God, but, as the poet puts it

tal era io a quella vista nova:
 veder voleva come si convene
 l' imago al cerchio e come vi s' indova;
 ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne"

(... I, intent to scan
 The novel wonder, and trace out the form,
 How to the circle fitted, and therein
 How plac'd: but the flight was not for my wing;)¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Dante, *Paradiso*, XVIII, 20-21.

¹⁵³ Dante, *Paradiso*, XXX, 61-69.

¹⁵⁴ Once Beatrice leaves Dante, the mystical contemplative St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) guides Dante onto the end of his journey.

¹⁵⁵ Dante, *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 137-139.

In a final lightning flash of understanding, which the poet is unable to express to his readers, Dante's soul becomes aligned with God's love:

A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa;
ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle,
sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,
l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.

(Here vigour fail'd the tow'ring fantasy:
But yet the will roll'd onward, like a wheel
In even motion, by the Love impell'd,
That moves the sun in heav'n and all the stars.)¹⁵⁶

Dyce and Religion

One possible attraction of these verses for Dyce would likely have been their combining of religion and visuality. As young men both Dyce and Dante had considered taking holy orders, Dante as a Franciscan—in the *Commedia* he still bears the girdle that signifies his allegiance—Dyce in the Church of England.¹⁵⁷ Like Dante, Dyce's deeply felt religious beliefs were inextricably linked to all aspects of his life. As a High Church Episcopalian, Dyce placed reverential emphasis on the priesthood, liturgy of the Prayer Book, ecclesiology, and on formal, Anglo-Catholic sacraments. These beliefs are evidenced in his published and semi-published literature. In 1830, the artist composed a now lost essay, "On the Garments of Jewish Priests".¹⁵⁸ In 1841 he co-founded the Motett Society to promote the revival of early church music, and three years later published a celebrated version of the *Book of Common Prayer*, with a Reformation period

¹⁵⁶ Dante, *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 142-145.

¹⁵⁷ "Dyce at one point debated whether to convert to Catholicism, as his friend John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman did in 1845. Dyce subsequently decided against conversion, but his close association with high profile Catholics, including Cardinal Wiseman and Newman, determined many of his decisions on what to paint and how to paint." Melville, *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, 39.

¹⁵⁸ James Stirling Dyce, *Dyce Papers*, Chapter I.

cantus firmus, for which he received a gold medal from the King of Prussia.¹⁵⁹ In 1843, Dyce published a pamphlet, “The Form and Manner of Laying the Foundation Stone of a Church or Chapel” for the building of Christchurch, Westminster, in which he described in detail the correct manner of conducting the service on such occasions. The following year he published “Notes on the Altar”, a historical survey of the position and function of the altar in relation to Anglican service.¹⁶⁰

In 1851, Dyce published “Shepherds and Sheep” (1851), which argues for priesthood authority in the Anglican Church. The pamphlet was a *riposte* to John Ruskin’s essay “Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds” (1851). A somewhat lapsed Evangelical, Ruskin decried in his essay both High Church pretensions to priesthood and Presbyterian objections to episcopacy. The primer to Dyce’s response to his friend and colleague reveals how inseparably linked religion was to his professional life:

You, at least, will not consider me disqualified from entering with you on theological ground by the fact of my being an artist, since both art and religion are subjects of equal interest and common to both of us; and if these pages should fall under the eyes of other classes of readers, I must simply shelter myself under the eminent examples which society now exhibits of clerical artists, and political, military, legal, and medical novel-writers, poets, and dissertators on theological, ecclesiastical and all other possible questions.¹⁶¹

Evidence Dyce’s religious beliefs are even more poignant in his personal writings. On November 8, 1849 William Dyce wrote to his fiancée on the subject of their impending marriage:

¹⁵⁹ William Dyce, *The Order of Daily Service, the Litany, and Order of the Administration of the Holy Communion, with Plain-Tune, According to the Use of the United Church of England and Ireland*, (London: Burns, 1843–44).

¹⁶⁰ Marcia Pointon, *William Dyce*, 67.

¹⁶¹ William Dyce, *Notes on Shepherds and Sheep* (London: Longman, Brown Green and Longmans, 1851).

“... my dear Jane, that our happiness may be secure, let us acknowledge the source of it in the Divine giver of all good things, with thankful hearts united in divine as well as human love... my motto is, ‘In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy steps’ a rule which I have never yet found to fail, and which affords an acting on it constant contentment and peace, as we shall both of us, no doubt, afterwards, have frequent occasion to verify.”¹⁶²

Dyce and Religious Art

Dyce applied this rule to all aspects of his life, especially his art. Indeed, religion intersected with art from the outset of his career. According to Dyce’s son, it was during his second visit to Rome in 1827-8 that the young artist became an intimate friend of the Nazarene painters, a brotherhood of German artists that adopted a pre-Reformation Christian lifestyle and early religious iconography, style and techniques in their painting. Dyce forged lifelong friendships with Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869) and Peter von Cornelius (1784-1867). This group of German artists lived and worked in the convent of S. Isidoro del Pincio, where the adulation of Dante was profound. At S. Isidoro, Dyce would have heard daily readings from the *Commedia* and seen illustrations for works by Dante from Peter von Cornelius, Philipp Veit and Joseph Anton Koch for the decoration of Casino Massimo in Rome (1818–24).¹⁶³ According to the artist’s son

During this second visit his artistic tendencies gradually underwent a complete change... he began as they did to regard Art exclusively in its most moral and religious aspect, and as a consequence to perceive the great charms of the works of the devout masters of the fifteenth century¹⁶⁴

For the present discussion, it is less important *how* Dyce found this painting idiom rather than that he had found a purpose which would be the inspiration to illuminate his

¹⁶² Letter to Jane Bickerton Brand, Dyce Papers, Chapter XXVIII.

¹⁶³ Otto Lutterotti, *Joseph Anton Koch 1768-1839. Leben und Werk* (Vienna; Munich: 1985), 44-48.

¹⁶⁴ James Stirling Dyce, Dyce Papers, Chapter I.

future career: the creation of a Christian art. Just as Beatrice functioned as the conduit through which Dante perceived the truth of Christian revelation, art functioned for Dyce in much the same way. Art was Dyce's "Beatrice": it both lifted and informed.¹⁶⁵

Like Dante, Dyce "wandered in the wilderness" during the 1830s and early 1840s, when he found the market for austere Christian works considerably limited. According to James Stirling, his father produced several paintings of Madonnas and similar subjects during this time but was disheartened by the lack of interest.¹⁶⁶ Dyce's friend Cardinal Wiseman (1802-1865), who would later become Archbishop of Westminster, encouraged the young artist in 1834:

When portrait painting and scene painting or what is very akin to it form the surest careers to success for a young artist, to see one who dares to admire and longs to imitate the old, symbolic, Christian and truly chaste manner of the ancients is refreshing indeed to the mind; it is like listening to a strain of Palestrina, after a boisterous modern finale. I do not know whether the wish to paint your symbolical designs of the B.V. [Blessed Virgin] excludes every other place but Rome for its fulfillment.¹⁶⁷

By the time Cardinal Wiseman wrote the artist from Rome, Dyce would have already begun work on *Lamentation Over the Dead Christ* [Fig. 16], which he exhibited at the

¹⁶⁵ Just as Beatrice mediates between Dante and God, the poet likewise appears to take on a similar role his readers. As a poet and creator, Dante was charged with the task of transmitting his vision to his audience:

Leva dunque, lettore, a l'alte rote
meco la vista, dritto a quella parte
dove l'un moto e l'altro si percuote;
e li comincia a vagheggiar ne l'arte
di quel maestro che dentro a sé l'ama,
tanto che mai da lei l'occhio non parte.

(O reader! to the lofty wheels, with me,
Thy ken directed to the point, whereat
One motion strikes on th' other. There begin
Thy wonder of the mighty Architect,
Who loves his work so inwardly, his eye
Doth ever watch it...) (*Paradiso* X, 7-12)

¹⁶⁶ James Stirling Dyce, Dyce Papers Chapter II, quoted in Ann Steed, *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, 106.

¹⁶⁷ James Stirling Dyce, Dyce Papers, Chapter II.

Royal Scottish Academy in 1835. It is perhaps a measure of how unprepared Dyce's Scottish audience was for the painting—highly reminiscent of similar Lamentations by Perugino—that not one contemporary review of the work can be found.¹⁶⁸ A decade later in London, however, Dyce went on to successfully exhibit Old Testament subjects: *King Joash Shooting the Arrow of Deliverance* (1844) [Fig. 17] and *The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel* (1850) [Fig. 18], of which several copies were painted for eager customers. Despite the weighty Westminster fresco commission, which occupied the artist for the last two decades of his life, Dyce found time to paint a reredos in the chancel of All Saints Margaret Street between 1853 and its dedication in 1859 [Figs. 19 & 20]. Highly formal, the composition represents three stages in the Life of Christ: his Nativity, Crucifixion and triumph in Heaven. The hierarchical arrangement, exquisite detail, pastel hues, conspicuous haloes, and the centrality of the Virgin in the bottom register all reflect the artist's High Church sympathies. During this time Dyce also produced small-scale easel paintings that illustrate various scenes from the life of Christ. These placed biblical figures in naturalistic landscapes more similar to Britain than to the Levant. These include *The Good Shepherd* (1859) [Fig. 21], *David in the Wilderness* (c. 1859) [Fig. 22], *Christ and the Woman of Samaria* (1860) [Fig. 23], and *Man of Sorrows* (1860) [Fig. 24].

These later works have in common an intensity of vision that comes through direct observation of nature. Dyce combines naturalism, however, with a spirituality that comes from his own deeply felt faith.¹⁶⁹ This point is brought to a summation in Dyce's two most popular paintings: *Titian Preparing to Make His First Essay in Colouring* (1856-7) [Fig. 25] and *Pegwell Bay, Kent—a Recollection of October 5, 1858* (1858-60)

¹⁶⁸ Anne Steed, *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, 23.

¹⁶⁹ Jennifer Melville, *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, 45.

[Fig. 26]. In the first, the young sixteenth-century Venetian artist is perched on a chair as he ponders an unadorned Gothic statue of the Madonna and Child set upon a gnarled stump. His left hand holds his head up to gaze upon the statue while his right hand rests on an open sketchbook. A *porte-crayon* with charcoal and white chalk in either end is barely visible below his hand under a cluster of many-hued flowers. More flowers spill from an open basket at his feet. Accoutrements of a watercolorist are visible, including an exquisitely rendered cut-glass water bottle, a sponge and a rag.¹⁷⁰

Frequently touted as the most Pre-Raphaelite of the artist's works, Dyce paints everything with perfect precision, with colors brilliantly applied over a white ground. Like the Pre-Raphaelites, the young Titian works in the open air, exulting in the immense variety of color and detail found in nature. Yet, the commanding statue of the Madonna, accentuated compositionally by the boy's walking stick and his ardent gaze (which is, in fact, returned by Mother and Child), equally reinforces Dyce's commitment to a devotional, Christian art. Originally, Carlo Ridolfi (1594-1658), whom Dyce loosely quotes in the Royal Academy exhibition catalogue, claimed that the young Titian painted an image of the Madonna on a discarded block of stone.¹⁷¹ Here, it appears the pallid statue, which is inspiring the painter far more than his vibrant palette of flowers, is about to receive its coloring. Thus, in Dyce's creative reinterpretation, naturalistic color becomes not an objective in itself but a vehicle for creating devotional art. For Dyce, especially in his late landscape paintings inhabited with biblical figures, no opposition

¹⁷⁰ Anne Steed, *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, 160.

¹⁷¹ "Onde ancor piccioletto col solo impulse della natura fece co'sughi di fiori entro ad uno capitello sopra ad una strada della sua Patria la figura della Vergine già non molto tempo, per occasione di certa fabrica rouinato". Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte ovvero le vite de gl'illustri pittori Veneti, e dello stato, Venice* (1648) I, 136. Quoted in Lindsay Errington, "Ascetics and Sensualists, William Dyce's Views on Christian Art," *The Burlington Magazine* 134 (1992), 496.

exists between devotional works and natural landscapes painted in the open air. If one accepts this as the general interpretation of the painting, Dyce's "discovery" of nature in his later years is presented to the viewer as a thing of religious, devotional value.¹⁷² Nature and naturalistic detail, thus, serve Dyce as a conduit through which he perceives the truth of Christian revelation in much the same way as Beatrice serves Dante.

The supernal role of nature as a guide can also be found in Dyce's most famous painting, *Pegwell Bay, Kent—a Recollection of October 5, 1858* (1858-60) [Fig. 26]. The painting is the result of a trip Dyce's family made in the autumn of 1858 to the fashionable resort of Pegwell Bay near Ramsgate. It depicts in the foreground members of the artist's immediate family: his wife, Jane, her sisters, Isabella and Grace, and the artist's oldest son, William. Although typical art historical interpretations—including the work's current online catalogue description at the Tate—point towards the artist's interest in geology as shown by his careful recording of the strata of the eroded chalk cliffs, this can only be one facet of its meaning, since Dyce's approach to nature, which combines elements of religion and science, results in an enlargement of vision.¹⁷³ The artist's family, completely absorbed with what is on the beach, fails to see the greater glory of God, symbolized by Donati's comet flying overhead. The artist on the right, staring up at the sky, sees like Dante the radiance of *nostra effige*:

Quella circolazion che sì concetta
pareva in te come lume riflesso,
da li occhi miei alquanto circunspetta,
dentro da sé, del suo colore stesso,
mi parve pinta de la nostra effige:
per che 'l mio viso in lei tutto era messo.

¹⁷² Errington "Ascetics and Sensualists," 496.

¹⁷³ <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dyce-pegwell-bay-kent-a-recollection-of-october-5th-1858-n01407>
Accessed December 12, 2012.

(... on that circling, which in thee
Seem'd as reflected splendour, while I mus'd;
For I therein, methought, in its own hue
Beheld our image painted: steadfastly
I therefore por'd upon the view...).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Dante Alighieri *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 127-132.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

One can admit at the outset that Dyce had no such immersion in Dante as can be found in Ruskin or Gladstone. Yet the four works discussed in this thesis were hardly a passing fashion for the artist. An auction of the artist's library a decade after his death reveals four lots related to the poet's works. The first lot comprised three volumes of the popular translation of the *Commedia* by Reverend H. F. Cary, published in 1831. The remaining three works were priceless Venetian copies of the *Commedia*, dating from 1520, 1564, and an exceptionally rare copy printed in 1491. Because the artist earned a precarious livelihood and it was not until the 1850s that he earned any measure of financial stability, it would appear Dyce's scholarship and estimation of Dante grew in tandem with his artistic career. This fact is borne out not only by his paintings but also by the language used in his works in this study. In his painting *Francesca da Rimini* (1837) [Fig. 2], Dyce used Ichabod Charles Wright's *Dante, Translated into English Verse* from which to extract his exhibition catalogue description. The text was one of the first inexpensive English compendia of all three *canticas* of the *Commedia*. By the time he sketched *Design for the Reverse of the Turner Medal* (1858) [Fig. 3] over twenty years later, Dyce was confidently reading the *Commedia* in its original Italian, perhaps from one of his prized Renaissance tomes, as evidenced by his inclusion in the design an original quote from *Purgatorio* not found in Ruskin's gloss of the episode from *Modern Painters* III.

Not only do the four works display increasing linguistic sophistication, they display deeper penetration into the *Commedia* and its author. In the first chapter, which

examines *Francesca da Rimini* (1837) [Fig. 2], evidence is provided of the selective appreciation of Dante held by British painters and writers during the first half of the century.¹⁷⁵ Chiefly drawn to the sublime and the horrific, the hellish punishments of *Inferno*, and especially that of tragic Francesca da Rimini, most piqued audiences during the nineteenth century. For nineteenth-century readers, the most significant aspect of the story was that the two lovers are condemned for eternity because of their love; this corresponds to the Romantic conception of love as an all-important, all-powerful force, one to which it is both inevitable and desirable to sacrifice oneself.¹⁷⁶ Like writers and artists of his day, Dyce makes an attempt to capture the pathos of Francesca's eternal plight sparked by her love, which caused Dante to swoon and collapse as if dead. To do this, Dyce provided his audience with a backstory, which, following the example of contemporary Romantic authors such as Leigh Hunt, he finds readily in Wright's gloss of Boccaccio.

Design for the Reverse of the Turner Medal (1858) [Fig. 3] penetrates even deeper into the poet's works. By illustrating Dante's vision of Rachel and Leah as a design for the Turner Medal, it has been posited in this thesis that Dyce approved of Ruskin's explication of Turner's art and the study of nature in *Modern Painters* III. Ruskin's endorsement, however, is probably not sufficient in itself a motivation for its inclusion; it can be reasoned that by selecting this specific episode, Dyce is demonstrating an insightful personal engagement with *Purgatorio* and its author.

¹⁷⁵ As noted in the introduction, the vast majority of early English translations comprised the *Inferno* or selected parts of the *Inferno* only.

¹⁷⁶ Michael Pitwood, *Dante and the French Romantics* (Geneva: Droz, 1985), 268.

Much the same could be said with the episodes that informed the creation of *Beatrice* (1859) [Fig. 4] and *Dante and Beatrice* [Fig. 1]. As Dante's *Vita nova* came into wider circulation among Victorians during the middle of the century, the figure of Beatrice displaced that of Francesca. As discussed in Chapter three, however, Gladstone and Dyce were somewhat unique in privileging Beatrice's theological, universal portrayal in *Paradiso* over her youthful interpretation in *Vita nuova*. Beatrice, the catalyst for the *Commedia*, represents not just any love but divine love, and it is in *Paradiso* that she comes into her own. Still, the *cantica* remains the least admired of the *Commedia*. The nine circles of gruesome torture in *Inferno* rapidly captured the popular imagination, while by mid-century *Purgatorio* became the choice of connoisseurs like John Ruskin. For High Church Anglicans like Dyce and Gladstone, however, the idea of a perfect heaven looking down upon and a very imperfect world, described in solemn, liturgical language, had obvious attractions. As Dante exclaimed, as looking down upon Earth from the eighth sphere of heaven

Col viso ritornai per tutte quante
 le sette spere, e vidi questo globo
 tal, ch'io sorrisi del suo vil sembiante;
 e quel consiglio per migliore approbo
 che l' ha per meno; e chi ad altro pensa
 chiamar si puote veramente probo.

(... and with mine eye return'd
 Through all the seven spheres, and saw this globe
 So pitiful of semblance, that perforce
 It moved my smiles: and him in truth I hold
 For wisest, who esteems it least: whose thoughts
 Elsewhere are fix'd, him worthiest call and best.)¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Dante, *Paradiso*, XXII, 133-138.

Virgil, with his earthly horizon of reason, could never give to Dante a heavenly vantage like the one enjoys in these verses from *Paradiso*. Here again is the central motif of the *cantica*, and, of indeed, much of Dyce's artistic and literary output: the spiritual development mankind, represented by the acquisition of vision, as truth is shown to him in divine light.

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